

ABSTRACT

Giving Color to the Vague Problem of Boredom: Observations and Responses

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One's superficial conception of 'boredom' is typically devoid of much meaning. Boredom is vaguely understood as a general marker and rubric of self-dissatisfaction and is technically understood by few. This paper contains four objectives: the first objective is to properly and technically define what the state of boredom is with precision and clarity. The second objective is to explain why the problem of boredom has become so prevalent in Western society today. This chapter largely takes rationalism and the rise of what sociologist Zygmunt Bauman would call liquid modernism into account. The third chapter hopes to show the universality of the problem of boredom for both religious and non-religious moderns, and to re-emphasize that boredom is not so much a religious issue but an issue of alienation and identity. The final chapter hopes to offer some responses for how to address this pernicious problem of boredom in each of our lives.

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Giving Color to the Vague Problem of Boredom: Observations and Responses

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DEDICATION

To all those who are bored to death

PREFACE

Boredom is often shallowly referred to, as T. S. Eliot famously stated, being “distracted from distraction by distraction.” I assert that true boredom at its most devastating goes much deeper, ultimately manifesting in the inability to truly exist as a fulfilled self. By understanding the historical evolution of the most destructive, worst states of boredom, people can learn what exacerbates boredom in themselves, why it is so prevalent, and how to potentially correct it. In Chapter 1, we discuss the *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* in order to understand boredom’s emergence and dissonant nature. This chapter also explains the definition and nature of boredom using the works of Arendt, Kierkegaard and others in order to explain why boredom is so conceptually challenging. Chapter 2 discusses how neglect of the *vita contemplativa*, or contemplative life, combined with the rise of technical rationalism, led to the liquid modernism that aggravates the problem of boredom. This chapter also shows how Albert Camus fails to solve the problem of boredom, while Greg Lukainoff and Jonathan Haidt explain how liquid modernism’s embrace of elusivity leads to societal breakdown. Chapter 3 uses Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* to illustrate the problem of boredom and to show the insufficiency of solving boredom with contemplative grace but without active will. In Chapter 4 we see how Nietzsche’s will-to-power doctrine recognizes the problem of boredom and preaches a doctrine of activity while denying the role of contemplative grace in solving boredom. Ultimately, this project serves as a definition of boredom and a documentation of failure regarding how philosophers sought to solve it in the past. Our

resulting conceptual clarity of what boredom is, how it is caused, and how others failed gives us practical opportunities to solve this malaise.

CHAPTER ONE

The Deepest Throes of Boredom

The Ushering in of Modern Boredom

A student and mistress of Heidegger and modern philosopher in her own right, Hannah Arendt spent volumes trying to pinpoint and explain *The Human Condition* in her aptly titled book. Arendt points out a myriad of problematic issues that occurred during Britain's Industrial Revolution and the ensuing affects they had on the human psyche. To unpack its effects, Arendt draws a distinction between the two 'vitas': the *vita contemplativa* should be understood as the life of contemplation (Arendt 13) while "Traditionally, therefore, the term *vita activa* receives its meaning from the *vita contemplativa*; its [the *vita activa*'s] very restricted dignity is bestowed upon it because it serves the needs and wants of contemplation in a living body" (16). Arendt is saying that the *vita activa* is necessary, but not sufficient, for a good existence. It serves contemplation first and does not act of its own accord.¹ And yet, in light of England's Industrial Revolution Arendt says: "The emancipation of labor has not resulted in an equality of this activity with the other activities of the *vita activa*, but in its almost undisputed predominance" (126). Thus, instead of activity acting and doing service to the contemplative, she argues the *vita activa* was separated from the *vita contemplativa*:

¹This is Josef Pieper point when he says "All practical activity, from practice of the ethical virtues to gaining the means of livelihood, serves something other than itself. And this other thing is not practical activity. It is having what is sought after, while we rest content in the results of our active efforts. Precisely that is the meaning of the old adage that the *vita activa* is fulfilled in the *vita contemplativa*" (*Happiness and Contemplation* 93).

The reversal of the modern age consisted then not in raising doing to the rank of contemplating as the highest state of which human beings are capable, as though henceforth doing was the ultimate meaning for the sake of which contemplation was to be performed, just as, up to that time, all activities of the *vita activa* had been judged and justified to the extent that they made the *vita contemplativa* possible. (Arendt, 291-292)

This explains why the greatest thinkers of pre-modern times were often the rich aristocrats. The rich made progress and had deep insights; contemplation was a significant part of how they spent their monetarily unbridled existence and time. When man started doubting the concept of the contemplative, only the active life remained.

Arendt explains:

The fundamental experience behind the reversal of contemplation and action was precisely that man's thirst for knowledge could be assuaged only after he had put his trust into the ingenuity of his hands. The point was not that truth and knowledge were no longer important, but that they could be won only by "action" and not by contemplation. It was an instrument, the telescope, a work of man's hands, which finally forced nature, or rather the universe, to yield its secrets...After being and appearance had parted company and truth was no longer supposed to appear, to reveal and disclose itself to the mental eye of a beholder, there arose a veritable necessity to hunt for truth behind deceptive appearances. Nothing indeed could be less trustworthy for acquiring knowledge and approaching truth than passive observation or mere contemplation. In order to be certain one had to make sure, and in order to know, one had to do...Since then, scientific and philosophic truth have parted company; scientific truth not only need not be eternal, it need not even be comprehensible or adequate to human reason. It took many generations of scientists before the human mind grew bold enough to fully face this implication of modernity. (Arendt 291)

This doubting of the contemplative and the acceptance of mathematical, formulaic, methodical, observational sciences led to the push for the Industrial Revolution. Furthermore, Arendt argues that:

There is no lasting happiness outside the prescribed cycle of painful exhaustion and pleasurable regeneration, and whatever throws this cycle out of balance—poverty and misery where exhaustion is followed by wretchedness instead of regeneration, or great riches and an entirely effortless life where boredom takes the place of exhaustion and where the mills of necessity, of consumption and

digestion, grind an impotent human body mercilessly and barrenly to death—ruins the elemental happiness that comes from being alive. (Arendt 108)

Arendt is saying that life is ‘prescribed’ to be cyclical. If we disrupt that cycle by alienating the *vita activa* from the *vita contemplativa* then problems occur. This is how, for Arendt, the Industrial Revolution was damning. It gave people an identity completely rooted in “doing,” deeming contemplation irrelevant and abstract. Thus, activity and contemplation became disconnected.

Before the industrial age, a person’s work was unique. A person’s work was uniquely his. A shoemaker’s shoe was his product. But the industrial revolution cut the personal and the contemplative off, all in the name of efficiency and the now-dominant *vita activa*, for which “the ultimate goal is growing wealth, abundance, and the “happiness of the greatest number” (Arendt 133). Thus, pursuit of a better life became rooted in external doing rather than internal thinking. This is how boredom easily arrived: in the alienation of the two *vitas*, the focus on externality, and the tossing of contemplation by the wayside.

The Tedium of Time

With the *vita activa* becoming dominant, time emerged as an unavoidable, critical dimension of existence. The workday and weekday became existence’s structure. Time became inescapable, and the repetition of industrial work labeled as progress sowed seeds of what we commonly think of as boredom to occur.² Spacks explains that “The split

²“It is precisely the destruction of the traditional rhythms of life and the frantic, shock-producing acceleration of the production process that cause boredom...the “shock experience” of the worker at his machine is devoid of any substance, is isolated and disconnected...leisure provides merely an illusion of escape from the monotony of machine time” (Dalle Pezze and Salzani 132).

between work [time] and leisure [time] implicates the problem of boredom” (Spacks 17) and that “such understanding of work also sensitizes workers to the potential for boredom inherent in that activity itself, a potential barely acknowledged before the twentieth century” (Spacks 18). When humans lost the understanding³ that the internal life—internal reflection and activity beyond the existence of outside productivity and work—was relevant, boredom began to grow.

The Disappearance of the Introspective

Patricia Meyer Spacks, using Arendt’s logic, also argues that this industrial shift stoked the flames of modern boredom. By turning to solely focus on the products of their own *vita activa*, people lost the desire and ability for intensive reflection. People became ever more incapable of practicing contemplation and ignorant of its importance. The turn from contemplation and towards activity-oriented externalities for happiness, transcendence, and meaning encouraged chaos.⁴

The Rise of Distraction

The mindset that says abundant life, meaning, and happiness is found not in the internal contemplative, but the objective external world of activity and production fundamentally drives boredom. By losing boredom as an internal vice, humanity stopped

³“In pre-modern times, experience presented a connectedness and durability which implied a relation to memory and community. The term used by Benjamin to designate this experience is *Erfahrung*, which etymologically refers to the verb *fahren*, to travel, and is thus something learned from life and travels over an extended period of time and that can be narrative. Modern experience, for which Benjamin uses the term *Erlebnis*, is instead broken, immediate, limited and disconnected from memory and community” (Dalle Pezze and Salzani, 129).

⁴“Human beings perceived as causing boredom, and cultural situations understood to promote it, ultimately focus the primitive anger of unfulfilled entitlement” (Spacks 23).

recognizing it as a personal malady.⁵ Boredom became an external, object-based thing that could be solved with a new car, or a new job—distractions and diversions. Yet, boredom leaves many trapped whether suddenly or gradually, none of these diversions are enough. Many people will continue to look for the solution to boredom in their objects and activities, and thus never become contemplative. The industrial revolution and idyllic embrace of object and product as our saving grace, certainly took the [needed, self-aware] attention off our contemplative selves. This is key to Arendt, and key to our unpacking the reasons for this epidemic of boredom. Misunderstanding boredom as an external issue and not internal flaw may be why we remain so unaware of it. The remainder of this chapter will point out certain traits of boredom in order to focus our currently fuzzy picture of it.

Not Knowing Oneself

The Danish Philosopher Søren Kierkegaard writes about the interconnectedness of both boredom and despair.⁶ He explains in *The Sickness unto Death* that “In so far as the self does not become itself, it is not its own self, and not to be one’s own self is despair” (TSUD, 2-3) and that “The specific character of despair is precisely this: it is unconscious of being despair” (48). The lack of self-awareness, the inertness of our own existences, and our inability to recognize or even know whether we must change, can

⁵Acedia is an ancient word commonly linked to the modern conception of boredom. Raposa explains that “extended theological reflection concerning acedia begins during the fourth century of the common era. Evagrius took special pains to warn his brother monks about the “demon of noontide,” a powerful boredom that “besieges” the devotee, resulting in distraction from, sometimes even abandonment of, the spiritual [contemplative] life” (Raposa 20).

⁶The words for “boredom” and “despair” in the Danish lexicon are conceptually different. The word for boredom is “kedsomhed” while the word for despair is “fortvivelse.” They are interconnected but distinct from one another.

lead to despair. To show how boredom and despair are connected, Kierkegaard gives a brief sketch of one who has found the world utterly uninteresting and at fault (while viewing himself as innocent, victimized and blameless) and thus dwells in despair:

If the despairer makes a mistake, if he believes the misfortune lies in the complex world outside him, his despair is not true and it will lead him to hate the world and not to love it; for no matter how much the world gets in your way because it seems as if it wanted to be something else than it can be for you, once you have found your own self in despair you will love it for being the world that it is. (Either/Or, 504).

As long as despair is viewed as external tension to be solved, internal boredom will remain.

'Incurable' Modification

A fictional version of the truly bored person's despair, as seen in the *Diapsalmata*,⁷ is found in Charles Dickens' character Lady Dedlock of *Bleak House*: "Lady Dedlock is always the same exhausted deity, surrounded by worshippers, and terribly liable to be bored to death, even while presiding at her own shrine" (Dickens 113). Her seemingly incurable boredom⁸ is incurable because it rejects modification, and because it manifests itself in people who blame the objective external world for their despair, denying the possibility of subjective change as a possible solution to the

⁷"I can't be bothered. I can't be bothered to ride, the motion is too violent; I can't be bothered to walk, it's strenuous; I can't be bothered to lie down, for either I'd have to stay lying down and that I can't be bothered with, or I'd have to get up again, and I can't be bothered with that either. In short: I just can't be bothered." (Either/Or, 41).

⁸Spacks, who says "Boredom, unlike weariness, carries intimations of despair" (11) explains the association between Dedlock's boredom and her despair: "The insistent linkage of boredom with sin and misery makes us understand Lady Dedlock most profoundly as a victim—not of a tedious world (despite the undeniable tedium of her social environment) but of her own actions" (196) and "Lady Dedlock's boredom... as despair by its nature denies the possibility of change, so Lady Dedlock's boredom, closely allied to despair, rejects modification" (Spacks 196).

problem. This sense of internal alienation from the external world drives others to seek another world—their “it’s-got-to-be-more-home-than-this” place. Alienation of the *vita activa* from the *vita contemplativa* drives this later alienation from life itself.

Boredom as Concealment and Unawareness

Spacks argues that “If boredom disguises depression, depression’s symptoms may also obscure the presence of boredom...The distinction between depression and boredom, in other words, hinges on causality”⁹ (259). Boredom, as an intrinsically unaware state of being, will continually mask and deaden one’s own self to the pain behind it. Boredom is being unaware of a deeper malady or issue. It is inherently a state of concealment and self-deception.¹⁰ Self-awareness is fleeting because boredom is painful, emotional despair is hard to face, and “The full acknowledgement of boredom would imply acceptance of despair” (267-8). Thus, the bored man is often unaware of his situation, and unable to recognize his state of despair, which arrives hand-in-hand with the disinterested apathy that boredom brings: “This writer’s incapacity to take an interest in the world stems not from boredom but from depression” (185). Raposa, quoting Kierkegaard’s *The Sickness Unto Death*, says

Boredom is a malaise that afflicts a self that has become problematic to itself. The individual who flees boredom through diversion...such a person is the victim of a “despair which is ignorant of being despair”; his is truly “a feeling of nullity without realizing it. (Raposa 54)

⁹Recall how many people believe happiness and transcendence from drudgery and dullness lies outside themselves. The lack of focus on oneself can cause self-neglect and self-ignorance. Looking for external answers to internal problems increase the sentiments of both boredom and despair.

¹⁰“Her [Lady Dedlock’s] boredom implies the world’s incapacity to provide adequate stimulus for her, and it heroically conceals her anguish. Boredom as concealment marks her moral achievement...the alienation that leads to her death” (197).

In this way, boredom is inherently leprous. It is inherently unaware of itself as a state of despair.

Boredom and Imagination

This deeper boredom is not about desire, but disability and failure of desire: its sufferers are unable to see anything as interesting or even able to distract themselves from their numb existence. As Raposa says

The description of boredom as a failure of the imagination, then, is equivalent to my earlier characterization of it as a kind of semiotic breakdown. This failure is always already an *interpretive* failure—either the refusal or the inability to discover meaning in a thing or situation, to perceive it as interesting. (Raposa 125)

In this sense, boredom should be understood as a disorder that dulls its victims' ability to mentally construct and create.

Boredom as Nothingness

Boredom is also defined by emptiness and nothingness.¹¹ It is the *vita activa*, working without contemplating and doing for no reason that defines such gerbil-wheel-nothingness in full form. Kierkegaard explains in *Either/Or* that

Boredom rests upon the nothingness that winds its way through existence; its giddiness,¹² like that which comes from gazing down into an infinite abyss, is infinite. That the eccentric form of diversion mentioned above is based on boredom can also be seen from the fact that the diversion reverberates without making an echo, just because in nothing there isn't even enough to make an echo possible. Seeing that boredom is a root of all evil, as enlarged on above, what

¹¹Kierkegaard says that "Boredom, extinction, is precisely a continuity in nothingness" (*The Concept of Anxiety* 133).

¹²Kierkegaard continues to discuss this giddy emptiness, saying "In the unity of boredom admiration and indifference have become indistinguishable...The only analogy [for this] I know is the apostle of empty enthusiasm, who also journeys through life on an interjection—that is, people who are always making a profession of enthusiasm, everywhere making their presence felt, and whether something significant or insignificant is taking place, cry 'Ah!' or 'Oh!', because for them the difference between significant and insignificant has become undone in enthusiasm's blind and blaring emptiness" (*Either/Or* 223)

more natural than to try to overcome it?...‘Change’ is what all who are bored cry out for. (*Either/Or* 223)

Nothingness as Evil

To elaborate on Kierkegaard’s view of boredom as an origin of evil, nothingness should not be considered as an amoral concept. According to St. Augustine, evil is *privatio boni*, or the privation of the good. It is a perversion of a good thing and evil could not exist without the original (and primary) existence of the good. It is nothing. C. S. Lewis paints a powerful visual image of this concept in his work *The Great Divorce*, where hell is nearly nothing compared to the grand existence of heaven. Aquinas also argues that evil is nothingness, otherwise God Himself would unavoidably be the Creator of it. Evil is thus merely a defect of the good, having no more essence or substance than that.

If boredom is in essence “nothing,” then it is deeply tied to a common and traditionally Christian understanding of evil. It, like evil, is the privation of something—a small, withered, pathetic existence, which conceptually could never occur without the original rich and abundant thing. With a rich, abundant world to live in, the bored man, who is unable to enjoy or be interested in it, should be pitied. It is ironic how this boredom as nothingness can be so consumable and so exorbitant, yet so empty. In true boredom where all is perceived as uninteresting, and all is nothingness, the sufferer can gain the whole world¹³ and still find no interest in their soul. When all is reduced to nothingness, the bored scramble for transcendence and alienate themselves from this

¹³Raposa admits that “In an environment where the array of choices is staggeringly wide, the potential for cognitive and emotional “numbness” is frighteningly real. This also is a species of boredom, the deeper form of meaninglessness that Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger all struggled to expose” (63).

world in ambitions of being literally larger-than-[this]-life—a Gatsby, of sorts. True boredom is not just nothingness, but a longing for limitless infinitude in a quest for ‘somethingness.’

Boredom and Despair

Raposa ties some of our concepts mentioned together, asserting that

Boredom has something to do with “nothing,” the nothingness that lurks behind and threatens each person, every project, each moment...boredom sits on a conceptual map somewhere between interest and despair. It clearly implies a lack of interest or meaning, and when that lack is serious enough, a person risks falling victim to feelings of meaninglessness, and even of despair. The more bored one becomes, the further away one moves from a state of being interested, the closer to despair. (Raposa 34)

As one inches closer to true despair, he loses more and more interest in anything other than his disjointed internal self. He is not happy nor sad, strong-willed or hell-bent—he is merely indifferent about everything and anything. True despair is not a painful, anguished existence, but one of emotional leprosy. There is an isolation which comes upon a person so subtly, that it can even appear to be a liberation of some sort. It is akin to the lyrics of musician Kanye West’s song “Ghost Town.”¹⁴ You cannot get burned if you cannot feel. Raposa continues, “to be interested in something represents a form of dependence on that thing; I draw upon it as a source of enjoyment and satisfaction” (Raposa 35).

The Western doctrine of hyper-individualism surely justifies and even encourages one’s slip into despair. The malaise of change and unquenchable lust for dynamism and

¹⁴“I let it all go (go), of everything that I know, yeah
Of everything that I know, yeah
And nothing hurts anymore, I feel kinda free
We're still the kids we used to be, yeah, yeah
I put my hand on the stove, to see if I still bleed
Yeah, and nothing hurts anymore, I feel kinda free” -Ghost Town

unceasing variety is leading already-empty, constantly-thirsting people deeper into their uninterested, bored despair.

Destructive Boredom

Suddenly, boredom's insatiability is only quenched in the chaos of turning this fundamentally boring and flawed order upside-down. Indifferent and leprous, one sets the world ablaze, and does not initially recognize or feel any of the immediate consequences. This setting-the-world-ablaze mentality is what Joseph Schumpeter called the upending of industry and traditions: the capitalist's "creative destruction" (Schumpeter 82).

Boredom as Anti-relational

The bored man, being indifferent to all around him, is inevitably left only with himself. In deeming solutions to be found outside himself (and never finding any), the bored person in reactionary frustration ends up mentally alone. And in indifference, anti-sociality, and inability to make connection, there is supreme, ever-suspended detachment. Spacks calls "The corruption of an age of individuals: superficial, frivolous, and atomistic" (138), claims that "Boredom...remains an intensely personal experience" (20), and argues that "boredom both stems from and entails isolation" (266). She explains "the interesting (in its modern version) and the boring imply one another. Without the concept of engagement, disengagement has no meaning. Interesting means not boring; the boring is the not interesting" (116). If the world is forever uninteresting, then the person finding it so is all that remains.

Boredom and Time

Diversion-resistant boredom “Haunts and lingers. It is just such a profound boredom that Pascal had in mind when he described the wretchedness of the human condition as consisting in “inconstancy, boredom, anxiety” (Raposa 44). Moreover, for Pascal, the primary source of this wretchedness is the awareness, quite frequently obscured, that one exists suspended between the “two abysses of infinity and nothingness” (Raposa 44). Arendt argues that “The philosopher’s experience of the eternal...is precisely what separates the *vita contemplativa* from the *vita activa* in medieval thought” (Arendt 20). Raposa argues that “killing time’ is a rather futile form of self-defense, of self-preservation, [as] one attempts to kill time because time inevitably kills all things” (Raposa 41). He explains that “boredom itself is a heightened awareness of the passing of time. Lacking any immediate object of interest or enjoyment, the bored person is left alone with time” (Raposa 42). There is isolation in looking around and finding that time has made everything empty, obsolete, abstract. There is nothing that time does not erode¹⁵ except the despairing thinker that watches the dissolution occur. This pushes the bored to seek distraction from such nothingness, and the price paid is one’s awareness.¹⁶ This is why Jay Gatsby, the main character in Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, is so puzzling and full of tension. He throws the parties but never drinks. He

¹⁵Remember Shakespeare’s famous Sonnet 19

¹⁶Raposa continues, “Time stretches interminably for the bored person, seems never-ending. This is empty time, however, dead time—just as the individual who must endure it feels hollow and lifeless. The bored person has plenty of nothing, and it is this heightened awareness of nothingness that makes chronic boredom so intolerable. Therein lies an important motivation for seeking diversion, amusement. At the same time, the cost of doing so is clear: forgetfulness, a diminution of awareness” (42).

never forgets. He maintains awareness and wades through dead time for his past nostalgic love. Bored people who interpret the world as nothingness find time to be backbreaking.

The Bored Imagination

Boredom is a problem of imagination. In an external world of perpetual disinterest, the imagination could provide escape and alienation from this frustrating life. However, the truly bored man remains trapped in his dull predicament. Like Dickens' lady, he is 'deadlocked' in his banal despair. He is indifferent to everything, and weary because of it. Spacks argues that imagination enlarges desire. If there is little imagination, then there is little drive, and a lack of fuel for the engine of desire. She calls "boredom—lassitude, lack of desire, inability to engage wholeheartedly in internal or external action—a central problem of civilized existence" (45). The imagination of a man who cannot find anything meaningful is marred, and maybe that is because he himself is no thinking thing anymore. He is nothing but Heraclitan fire¹⁷ and ever-shifting change, part of a post-modern culture that says one should never identify with anything. This understanding of boredom as a failure or inability to imagine further cements boredom's place as a deeply personal issue.¹⁸ While the Garden of Eden was certainly a paradise, Spacks says that "Some have imagined Eden itself as boring" (11), and the inescapably bored certainly have. As like produces like, the dull imagination and internal mind of the

¹⁷A reference to the Presocratic philosopher Heraclitus' view of reality as ever-changing, in-flux, constant, all-consuming fire.

¹⁸"Even Dr. Johnson, for all his wisdom, failed to see that the condition he called "weariness" might not constitute, even temporarily, a necessary fact. All the wise and all the good tell him of the state's curability. They do not tell him that his weariness derives from his way of understanding, or feeling, his own experience" (Spacks 83).

observer is unable to interpret Eden and the sacred as anything more than just dull.¹⁹

Peter Kreeft quips that boredom is “spiritual anorexia.”²⁰ It is the inability to fully observe something, and to see its wealth and depth.²¹

Inert Boredom

Allegorically, true boredom is an intolerable, inert existence at the bottom of a mountain crevasse or pit. You cannot jump and kill yourself, but you cannot climb out either. There is no pain, but there is no escape. In the deepest throes of despair, where nothing hurts because nothingness is the essence of everything. In your now-bland state, you can permanently avoid painful realizations and emotional hurt as long as you do not try to climb out. This is apathy and dead, passive, pitiful stasis. This is true boredom that exists at despair’s trough that is hardly aware of itself.

The Banality of Boredom

The result of all this disinterest, isolation, detachment, and indifference is that nothing is sacred, and all is banal. If everything is uninteresting, then nothing is safe from being replaced or becoming a statistic. All is fungible and dull. All can give way to the erosions of time and effort. There is no ability or interested drive to push someone to create²² and there is only indifference to whether the world falls apart or not.

¹⁹“One might fail to discern the full religious significance of a particular thing or situation simply because of a lack of imagination, because of a dull imagination, perhaps caused by slothfulness, a failure to exercise it properly or with regularity” (Raposa 134).

²⁰Peter Kreeft, *Jesus Shock*.

²¹“Boredom implies—indeed, *is*, as I have often reiterated—a refusal to pay attention” (Spacks 140).

²²Spacks explains “Boredom by its nature stands in opposition to the activity of literary invention, as to all other activity [any forms of creation...]...the banality of evil is arguable, the banality of boredom manifest” (Spacks 24).

Conclusions

When a person wakes up and becomes self-aware of their boredom (and subsequent despair), they have no idea of how to escape such a horrible thing. Most (when they wake up at all) do not know how to deal with diversion-resistant, deadlocked boredom. True boredom is a deeply modern concept and state of existence that emerges when one lacks feeling and community and is so diseased all becomes uninteresting. It is akin to a state of deep, apathetic depression. Its connection to despair is deep. It is the condition in which there is no prospect of change, good or bad, and is a point reached where diversions no longer work. The truly bored are beyond distraction.

In sum, boredom is a leprous unawareness of underlying despair. It grew with society's disconnecting of the active and contemplative parts of life, deeming the contemplative irrelevant to lives of happiness and meaning. In light of Thomas Aquinas' teleological view that believing in God-given Grace completes, fulfills, and transforms nature,²³ the loss of contemplation meant that modern society lost its conceptual awareness of Grace. This makes boredom a concealed and disjointed interplay between the lives of both active will [*vita activa*] and contemplative grace [*vita contemplativa*]

²³“In this way the speculative intellect, or the reason, is the subject of Faith: for the intellect is moved by the command of the will to assent to what is of faith: for "no man believeth, unless he will" [Augustine: Tract. xxvi in Joan.]” ([ST](#), 3164).

CHAPTER TWO

Liquid Modernity

In *Liquid Modernity*, Polish Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman makes an important claim about modern society's identity. He explains,

As time flows on, 'modernity' changes its forms in the manner of the legendary Proteus²⁴... What was some time ago dubbed (erroneously) 'post-modernity', and what I've chosen to call, more to the point, 'liquid modernity,' is the growing conviction that change is the only permanence, and uncertainty the only certainty.²⁵ A hundred years ago 'to be modern' meant to chase 'the final state of perfection' – now it means an infinity of improvement, with no 'final state' in sight and none desired. (Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*)

This modernism is liquid when compared to traditional standards of objectivity, or in this case, solidity.²⁶ Bauman explains that many countries "are now head-over-heels engrossed in the chase after an exquisitely 'liquid modern,' consumerist form of life" (Foreword, *Liquid Modernity*). On the topic of consumerism, philosopher Alan Watts echoes²⁷ the sentiments of Blaise Pascal in his *Pensées*.²⁸ Both authors argue that vague

²⁴Proteus is an ancient sea monster in Greco-Roman culture.

²⁵Just as water ebbs and flows in constant flux, liquid modernism says that all of existence is mere change and flux, with nothing ever solid, certain, or objectively the case.

²⁶Like our traditional understanding of solids, Bauman says that solids hold their shape, have clear spatial dimensions, etc. He associates solidity with traditional understandings of grounded objectivity, rules, etc. Solids are rich and full of substance. There is meaning to be found in them.

²⁷Watts says that "If you say that getting the money is the most important thing, you will spend your life completely wasting your time... To structure your existence with an objective of monetary gain is to spend a lifetime chasing an abstraction."

²⁸"We never keep ourselves to the present moment. We look forward to the future as too slow in coming, as if to hasten its arrival, or we remember the past to hold it up as if it had happened too quickly. We are so undiscerning that we stray into times which are not our own and do not think of the only one that is truly ours, and so vain that we dream about those which no longer exist and allow the present without thinking about it. This is because the present usually hurts us. We hide it from sight because it wounds us, and if it is pleasant then we are sorry to see it pass. We try to buttress it with the future, and think of

abstracted fantasies primarily motivate us. Rather than an objective goal to be had or sought, it is the quest for a vague ‘more!’ that drives us onward—an overwhelming, insatiable lust. They reinforce Arendt’s claim that the *vita activa* now stands alone, but with a caveat.

The Unkillable, Inaccessible Contemplative

Humanity has clearly been unable to abandon interest in the abstract and contemplative, even if we find it inaccessible. Our *vita activa* is fully based on a contemplative foundation,²⁹ even if we, in our excessive, materialist consumerism, seem to have thrown out the actual contemplative [*vita contemplativa*] approach to life.

Bauman explains how “Under conditions of ‘liquidity’ everything could happen, yet nothing can be done with confidence and certainty” (Foreword, *Liquid Modernity*). There is utter potential and freedom for anything but guarantee of nothing. Our liquid modern age exacerbates the problem of boredom in its encouragement to always *become* but never actually *be* anything. It encourages people to maintain their ghostly lack-of-being/nothingness, which maintains the internal despair inseparable to people that have become nothing at all.

But how did we get here?

How did liquid modernity end up being the defining attitude of our age? Michael Oakeshott not only identifies the pain points that drive modern boredom but explains how rationalism brought in boredom and made the world banal. Oakeshott’s rationalists are

arranging things which are not in our power for a time we cannot be at all sure of attaining” (Pensées, Fragment 80).

prone to falling into boredom as they see the world outside of themselves as distinctly uninteresting.³⁰ The rationalist can condemn his environment, community, and world to the dustbin because his logic said so, and his logic reigns every part of himself. Some openness to more opinion—call it a subjectivity beyond just his rationalist brain—could benefit him. But there is also a strange, narcissistic individualism that can isolate rationalists from each other. Their bent knee before logic's throne connotes that everyone else loyal to reason should agree with them.³¹

Technical Rationalism

Oakeshott also agrees with Arendt on the origins of rationalism. He argues rationalism emerged around the time Arendt bemoaned the loss of the *vita contemplativa*³² due to thinkers such as Sir Francis Bacon and Renée Descartes (19). This rationalist shift correlated and happened in tandem (even caused) the loss of focus on the internal, and the passing over the *vita contemplativa* in forgetfulness. Bacon cried that the European state of knowledge was becoming stagnant.³³ He sought a formulaic technique or method of inquiry³⁴ and believed that “it is lack of discipline which stands between the

³⁰“The Rationalist never doubts the power of his ‘reason’ (when properly applied) to determine the worth of a thing, the truth of an opinion or the propriety of an action” (Oakeshott 6).

³¹Oakeshott explains that the rationalist “is something also of an individualist, finding it difficult to believe that anyone who can think honestly and clearly will think differently from himself” (6).

³²Oakeshott says “This moment is the early seventeenth century, and it [rationalism] was connected, *inter alia*, with the condition of knowledge—knowledge of both the natural and the civilized world—at that time” (18).

³³Oakeshott explains the reason for Bacon’s frustrations: “What appeared to be lacking was not inspiration or even methodical habits of inquiry, but a consciously formulated technique of research, an *art of interpretation*, a method whose rules had been written down. And the project of making good this want was the occasion of the unmistakable emergence of the new intellectual character I have called the Rationalist” (Oakeshott, 18, emphasis mine).

³⁴Out of a desire for certainty and “demonstrable knowledge of the world in which we live” (19).

natural reason and certain knowledge of the world” (19). According to Bacon, this new tool of rationalism’s two characteristics are that it is truly a technical, mechanical set of rules and that such rules would have universal application (20). Bacon breaks from Plato’s ancient dialectic tradition with this technical method designed for individual use.³⁵

Purgative Rationalism

Yet, rationalism’s irony is that “genuine knowledge must begin with a purge of the mind, because it must begin as well as end in certainty and must be complete in itself. Knowledge and opinion are separated absolutely” (20). If “certain knowledge can spring up only in an emptied mind; the technique of research begins with an intellectual purge” (21), then this rationalism advocates for intentional blindness. It makes opinions, thoughts, and hunches obsolete. It says that rose-colored glasses should be smashed and that eyes should be gouged in order to truly start seeing again.

Being Certain of Something/The Beauty of Certainty

The rationalist is enamored with the technical because of lust for certainty. This is perhaps driven by an even deeper fear of the unknown and of uncertainty. The technical ‘guarantees’ truth that is observational and scientific. It seems certain.³⁶ Yet, by nature it

³⁵“What distinguishes both Platonic and Scholastic from modern Rationalism: Plato is a rationalist, but the dialectic is not a technique” (Oakeshott 20). While past Platonic dialectics required community and group discussion to explore and discover truth, modern, formulaic methods only require a solitary, individual mind.

³⁶Oakeshott explains “knowledge, that is, which not only ends with certainty but begins with certainty and is certain throughout. And this is precisely what technical knowledge appears to be. It *seems* to be a self-complete sort of knowledge...it has the aspect of knowledge that can be contained wholly between the two covers of a book, whose application is, as nearly as possible, purely mechanical” (16).

is intrinsically reductionist. It takes all of the external into the account and sells it to us as the whole picture.³⁷ Thus, the half-lie or half-full truth becomes the whole truth (Barfield, 106). Not only is knowledge flawed in that it is incomplete, but its poison is stronger as its victims have had their minds purged. These modern men have sacrificed their previous thoughts and feelings for this single, rigid, ‘straight and narrow’ lie. They have voluntarily sacrificed everything for this singular remaining way of the automaton. Yet, the self-made man cannot actually be self-made.³⁸ Technical knowledge is incomplete, “and if its self-completeness is illusory, the certainty which was attributed to it on account of its self-completeness is also an illusion” (17). A man with a truly blank mind would be fungible and boring: one with no internal urge or penchant for creativity or wonder, only a formulaic, technical, rule-following zombie.

Critiques of Rationalism’s Emptiness

Rationalism historically has not gone uncriticized. Blaise Pascal, “perceived, first, that the Cartesian desire for certain knowledge was based upon a false criterion of certainty” (24). The irony of turning everything into abstract, mechanistic formula entails the loss of all traditions and notions of reality. We have designed rules that work in a hypothetical, virtual world, but we have no idea whether such rules apply to flesh-and-blood reality. Oakeshott says that what rationalists offered society was “like jumped-up kitchen-porters deputizing for an absent cook, their knowledge does not extend...no

³⁷Owen Barfield in his essay on *The Harp and the Camera* explains how a camera seems to tell the truth, which is what makes its image so superficially compelling. Unlike the camera, the harp is played by something beyond itself. It communicates truths that are not self-manufactured and exist outside of itself.

³⁸Oakeshott explains that “nothing...can in fact be imparted to [such] an empty mind; and what is imparted is nourished by what is already there” (17).

tastes in their mouths” (27). This is the problem of Immanuel Kant³⁹ and of King Midas: “The Rationalist is always in the unfortunate position of not being able to touch anything, without transforming it into an abstraction: he can never get a square meal of experience” (Oakeshott 31). Midas can be rich, but he cannot be a man who actually engages and experiences the incarnate world. He can never escape being bored. So, like Gatsby, even our society’s greatest, most successful men, are dissatisfied. They won the game step-by-step, but it cost them the world. It costs the heart and soul. Thus, the bland existence they inhabit leaves them bored to death. Oakeshott asserts that time periods, myths, folklores, traditions are all expendable when rationalism’s technique reigns supreme.⁴⁰ The rationalist’s blindness leads him to view external reality as uninteresting and meaningless: a place where distractions are preferred to dullness. Our rationalist quickly becomes an abstract, big-picture generalist who has no intimacy or engagement with anyone or anything.⁴¹ He is Kipling, but no Englishman. He sees with a telescope⁴² yet does not know what he sees.

³⁹On Kant’s virtual world idea: “We can have cognition of no object as a thing in itself, but only insofar as it is an object of sensible intuition, i.e., as an appearance...” (Bxxvi of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*) and “If the world is a whole existing in itself, it must be either finite or infinite. But it is neither finite nor infinite—as has been shown, on the one side, by the thesis, on the other, by the antithesis. Therefore the world—the content of all phenomena—is not a whole existing in itself. It follows that phenomena are nothing, apart from our representations. And this is what we mean by transcendental ideality.” (A506/ B534 of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*)

⁴⁰Oakeshott says that “folk-lore, because it is not technique, is identified with nescience, and all sense of what Burke called the partnership between present and past is lost” (28).

⁴¹Oakeshott explains “he [the rationalist] has no sense of the cumulation of experience, only of the readiness of experience when it has been converted into a formula...only the power of recognizing the large outline which a general theory imposes upon events” (6).

⁴²From *On Rudyard Kipling and Making the World Small* in G.K. Chesterton’s *Heretics*.

Oakeshott's rationalist analysis smacks of Albert Camus, who believes that humankind must choose to delight in variety, as there is nothing meaningful in or beyond this life. There is a ceiling to our existence, and we smack our heads hard on it during our slip into death and the nothingness after. Both the bored and the rationalists⁴³ lack imagination because they are largely the same.

Art's Disappearance

Being a constructivist, the rationalist does not understand nor appreciate art. He is bored because he has a blind spot to beauty, and thus the world appears boring. He cannot contemplate and see beauty as Josef Pieper believes only seeing, contemplative men can (Pieper, 79-80)⁴⁴. He has been emptied of the *vita contemplativa* via technical knowledge's first request of total mental emptiness. Because the rationalist man puts all his eggs in the basket of technical knowledge, he lives the practical life poorly. He strives to live pragmatically but disregards what Oakeshott calls and defines as "practical knowledge." Technical knowledge, while useful, is limited:

It is possible to write down technical knowledge in a book. Consequently, it does not surprise us that when an artist writes about his art, he writes only about the technique of his art. This is so, not because he is ignorant of what may be called aesthetic element, or thinks it unimportant, but because what he has to say about *that* he has said already (if he is a painter) in his pictures, and he knows no other way of saying it. (Oakeshott 14).

⁴³Oakeshott says "His [the rationalist's] mind has no atmosphere...with an almost poetic fancy, he strives to live each day as if it were his first, and he believes that to form a habit is to fail...in the temperament, if not in the character, of the Rationalist, a deep distrust of time, an impatient hunger for eternity and an irritable nervousness in the face of everything topical and transitory" (7).

⁴⁴"Moreover, we must in some manner be able to partake of the object of this act, that drink called happiness. We do so in earthly contemplation, no matter what the manner of the drinking may be. This means: God is present in the world; He can appear "before the eyes" of one whose gaze is directed toward the depths of things...loving knowledge, seeing the beloved object, is the essence of contemplation" (*Happiness and Contemplation* 79).

The rationalist cannot translate what the artist seeks to say in the only way he knows how.⁴⁵ He has been so emptied that he cannot taste truths meant to be experienced and absorbed. Thus, he condemns it all as “boring.” The inability to find the external world interesting, inevitably leaves men in boredom and despair.

In this way, rationalism’s solely technical knowledge⁴⁶ suffocates art⁴⁷ and beauty. Style, art, and beauty cannot exist⁴⁸ without practical knowledge. Nothing more than mechanical formula can.⁴⁹ Lewis illustrates such a formulaic, sterile world in *That Hideous Strength*. There is no room for mystery, art, or love. The world is formulaic and neat, but blank. It is conceptually beautiful but frightening in reality. This rationalist purge of the practical dulls the imagination, deems art inaccessible, and leaves men bored.

⁴⁵Technical knowledge falling short is Wittgenstein’s point when he speaks of there being no such thing as a private language. As McGinn says of Wittgenstein, “It is in the forms and patterns of a shared practice, or way of using signs, that we discover the rules for the employment of the linguistic techniques of a radically foreign language, and not in anything that is hidden in the minds of its speakers” (McGinn 109).

⁴⁶Oakeshott’s definition for rationalism states that “rationalism is the assertion that what I have called practical knowledge is not knowledge at all, the assertion that, properly speaking, there is no knowledge which is not technical knowledge” (15).

⁴⁷“What was the *Art of Living* has become the *Technique of Success*.” (Oakeshott 23).

⁴⁸The discussion of technical education makes us return to Aristotle and Arendt. A shoemaker can’t be virtuous when his art and craft is no longer either of those, but simply mindless, scalable technique. So the loss of the *vita contemplativa* is seen here: efficient, technical, and quick.

⁴⁹This is seen in Oakeshott’s reaffirmation that “the sovereignty of ‘reason’, for the Rationalist, means the sovereignty of technique” (16).

Rationalism and politics

Oakeshott points to another originator of technical rationalism: admirers of Niccolo

Machiavelli.⁵⁰ He explains:

None of these [new and politically inexperienced social classes] had time to acquire a political education before it came to power: each needed a crib, a political doctrine, to take the place of a habit of political behavior. Some of these writings are genuine works of political vulgarization: they do not altogether deny the existence or worth of a political tradition (they are written by men of real political education), but they are abridgments of a tradition, rationalizations purporting to elicit the 'truth' of a tradition and to exhibit it in a set of abstract principles, but from which, nevertheless, *the full significance of the tradition inevitably escapes*. (Oakeshott 30-31).

These descendants took words to heart without grasping the entirety of the picture. They threw out tradition to do their own modern, muddled thing. But there are also those who beyond just abridging rich intellectual/practical traditions actually "cover up all trace of the political habit and tradition of their society with a purely speculative idea: these belong to the strictest sect of Rationalism" (31). This is idealism in its most theoretical, pure form.

Oakeshott thinks that Karl Marx was the most incarnate embodiment of this rationalism in most abstracted form⁵¹ and believed that Americans were rationalists from the start.⁵² Yet, the political tradition of Conservatism, which hopes to progress by

⁵⁰"It was not Machiavelli himself, but his followers, who believed in the sovereignty of technique, who believed that government was nothing more than 'public administration' and could be learned from a book" (Oakeshott 30).

⁵¹"So far as authority is concerned, nothing in this field can compare with the work of Marx and Engels...no fault can be found with the mechanical manner in which this greatest of all political cribs has been learned and used by those for whom it was written. No other technique has so imposed itself upon the world as if it were concrete knowledge: none has created so vast an intellectual proletariat, with nothing but its technique to lose" (Oakeshott 31).

⁵²Oakeshott says "they [Americans] were disposed to believe, and they believed more fully than was possible for an inhabitant of the Old World, that the proper organization of a society and the conduct of its affairs were based upon abstract principles" (32). Oakeshott viewed the drafting of the Declaration of Independence as a rationalist's reconstruction of society (33).

patching and repairing past mistakes while preserving the rest of tradition⁵³ (Kirk, 40-41) has no real place for the rationalist thinker who disregards tradition in scorn—both Kirk and Burke would not tolerate such behavior. Naturally, rationalism does not understand the value of Conservatism either.⁵⁴ Oakeshott does not condemn rational arguments or logic as much as he condemns modernity's emphasis on technique, and the purgation of traditions when they do not fit the formula. For the rationalist,

Each generation, indeed, each administration, should see unrolled before it the blank sheet of infinite possibility. And if by chance this *tabula rasa* has been defaced by the irrational scribbles of tradition-ridden ancestors, then the first task of the Rationalist must be to scrub it clean; as Voltaire remarked, the only way to have good laws is to burn all existing laws and to start afresh. (Oakeshott 9)⁵⁵

In the name of “cleaning house,” rationalism will ruthlessly destroy it does not find agreeable to itself.

Rationalism's Reactionary Disorder

Rationalism's impracticality leads to further disorder and its own future demise. We reduce all the rules to a book, and then because of its rigidity and impracticality we throw them all away.⁵⁶ Its progressive irony is that its severe technicalities lead to its own ultimate rejection.

⁵³Referencing Edmund Burke's view of Conservatism(as political thinker Russell Kirk views it) in Kirk's book *The Conservative Mind*.

⁵⁴By some strange self-deception, he [the rationalist] attributes to tradition (which, of course, is pre-eminently fluid) the rigidity and fixity of character which in fact belongs to ideological politics” (Oakeshott 36).

⁵⁵“If you are desirous of having good laws, burn those which you have at present, and make fresh ones.” -The Works of Voltaire, Vol. VI (Philosophical Dictionary Part 4)

⁵⁶Oakeshott explains “Indeed, so impractical is a *purely* rationalist politics, that the new man, lately risen to power, will often be found throwing away his book and relying upon his general experience of the world as, for example, a businessman or a trade union official [President Trump immediately comes to mind here, as President Trump would [often](#) refuse to read intelligence reports specifically crafted for

The technical cog/splintered man:

Rationalism to Oakeshott is deeply nihilist.⁵⁷ The rationalist man's existence, despite there being a technique and method, becomes splintered because he becomes all method and no man. He abstracts and reduces himself into fungible bits-and-pieces. His empty existence is shallow, making his life boring, leaving him unaware of why he is sad, despairing, and jaded. It is because he cannot even comprehend or be aware of the deep end which he avoids.⁵⁸ In this way, human unawareness and concealment again rear their ugly heads in rationalism, just as they did in the bored: "The Rationalist is essentially ineducable; and he could be educated *out* of his Rationalism only by an inspiration which he regards as the great enemy of mankind" (37). Rationalists have a reductive contempt for what they do not understand.⁵⁹

Rationalist existence prioritizes use⁶⁰, deeming beauty, virtue, and the divine as useless. Society says that "it is not very important that people should learn the piano" (39) but a man without any skills like the piano and only knows quantitative modeling is

him.] This experience is certainly a more trustworthy guide than the book—at least it is real knowledge and not a shadow—but still, it is not a knowledge of the political traditions of his society" (36).

⁵⁷Oakeshott explains "to the Rationalist, nothing is of value merely because it exists (and certainly not because it has existed for many generations), familiarity has no worth, and nothing is to be left standing for want of scrutiny. And his disposition makes both destruction and creation easier for him to understand and engage in, than acceptance or reform" (8).

⁵⁸"His knowledge will never be more than half-knowledge, and consequently he will never be more than half-right. Like a foreigner [an alien to his own world!] or a man out of his social class, he is bewildered by a tradition and a habit of behavior of which he knows only the surface" (Oakeshott 36).

⁵⁹"He conceives a strange contempt for what he does not understand: habit and custom appear bad in themselves, a kind of nescience of behavior" (Oakeshott 36).

⁶⁰"In a society already largely rationalist in disposition, there will be a positive demand for training of this sort. Half-knowledge (so long as it is the technical half) will have an economic value: there will be a market for the 'trained' mind which has at its disposal the latest devices" (Oakeshott 38).

obviously boring. Where is the romance, mystery, and flavor? The man that society celebrates and produces through technical education is an automaton.

Camus and Boredom

Albert Camus responds to, but falls short of solving, the problem of boredom. He believes that we must struggle (however tedious and inefficient that may be) to be something resembling happy. The 2 last lines of his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* are “The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man’s heart. *One must imagine Sisyphus happy*” (123).

Suicide

In an interview with *The Journal of Happiness and Well-Being* (2014), Zygmunt Bauman responds to a question about whether sociology will help people find happiness in this way:

I was asked this [about happiness] and similar questions on oodles of occasions. I never found a better response than to repeat the answer given by Johann Wolfgang Goethe to the question whether he had ‘a happy life’. As you must know by now, he replied that he had a happy life, though he couldn’t recall a single happy week. The message in that statement is as easy to read out as it is crucial for our understanding of the nature of happiness: namely, that happiness does not consist in freedom from trouble, but in confronting troubles, fighting them and conquering...

In many ways, this life of fighting and conquering depicts the view of Albert Camus observed through his work *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Camus begins his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* with this question: “There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy” (*TMOS* 3). Camus explains how a

man who feels he cannot explain a world is left as an alien or stranger in that world (6).⁶¹ Camus also says that the act of “eluding” is about hope, explaining “Eluding is the invariable game. The typical act of eluding, the fatal evasion that constitutes the third theme of this essay, is hope. Hope of another life one must “deserve” or trickery of those who live not for life itself but for some great idea that will transcend it, refine it, give it a meaning, and betray it” (8). Elusiveness to Bauman⁶² is a deep trait of the post-modern, liquid age. It is a notch on the belt of detachment, and a feature of the jumbled abstractions that roil and moil about in our minds. Camus is reactionary to the foolish rationalists that led to the dreary machine, and against the scaling of the *vita activa*’s stranglehold across our lives. He tells people to embrace quantity over quality, as quality is such a subjective thing.

Camus’ underlying rationalism/his reactionary-to-rationalism philosophy

There is a deeply reductive and rationalist flavor to Camus’ understanding of how the world works, because to Camus life is structured as a play of varying roles. His underlying rationalism is seen in his worldview that requires a theatrical framework to work. Camus admits,

It is probably true that a man remains forever unknown to us⁶³ and that there is in him something irreducible that escapes us. But *practically I know men and*

⁶¹Recall how rationalists find the world of tradition an alien place, as they only know the surface of things (footnote 58).

⁶²“Fluid’ modernity is the epoch of disengagement, elusiveness, facile escape and hopeless chase. In ‘liquid’ modernity, it is the most elusive, those free to move without notice, who rule” (Liquid Modernity, 120).

⁶³The challenge of knowing oneself is not a new one. Consider these quotes by two extremely different men in St. Augustine and Friedrich Nietzsche: “We are unknown, we knowers, to ourselves ... Of necessity we remain strangers to ourselves, we understand ourselves not, in ourselves we are bound to be mistaken, for each of us holds good to all eternity the motto, “Each is the farthest away from himself”—as far as ourselves are concerned we are not knowers.” (Nietzsche in *The Genealogy of Morals*) and “O God, I pray you to let me know my self.” (St. Augustine)

recognize them by their behavior, by the totality of their deeds, by the consequences caused in life by their presence. (TMOS 11)

and again: “I can define them *practically*, appreciate them *practically*, by gathering together the sum of their consequences in the domain of the intelligence, by seizing and noting all their aspects, *by outlining their universe*” (TMOS 11). This kind of rationalist thinking forces a specific, stereotypical framework on complex beings for ‘practical’ and ‘useful’ purposes: mechanistic, rationalist methods to make us efficient for the world’s machine.

The disease of boredom—if we wake up and out of our unaware despair and recognize it as an indicative disease—could be a good thing as long as we take a good look at it and stop distracting ourselves from it. Camus explains how the boredom can be a good thing. “Bored-to-death” weariness should be viewed as an indication and choice.⁶⁴ Perhaps there is a way out of boredom.

Disagreements on the potential for unity

Camus admits “that nostalgia for unity, that appetite for the absolute illustrates the essential impulse of the human drama” (TMOS 17). He would agree with Kierkegaard’s belief⁶⁵ that how to solve boredom and underlying despair involves communion and

⁶⁴“One day the “why” arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement. “Begins”—this is important. Weariness comes at the end of the acts of a mechanical life, but at the same time it inaugurates the impulse of consciousness. It awakens consciousness and provokes what follows. What follows is the gradual return into the chain or it is the definitive awakening. At the end of the awakening comes, in time, the consequence: suicide or recovery. In itself weariness has something sickening about it. Here, I must conclude that it is good” (TMOS 13).

⁶⁵“The self is the conscious synthesis of infinitude and finitude which relates itself to itself, whose task is to become itself, a task which can be performed only by means of a relationship to God. But to become oneself is to become concrete. But to become concrete means neither to become finite nor infinite, for that which is to become concrete is a synthesis. Accordingly, the development consists in moving away from oneself infinitely by the process of infinitizing oneself, and in returning to oneself infinitely by the process of finitizing. If on the contrary the self does not become itself, it is in despair, whether it knows it or not. However, a self, every instant it exists, is in process of becoming, for the self [potentially] does not

unity, though Camus does not believe in God. But for Camus, this desire for unity leads us to getting lost in our heads—living in this reality motionless and inert, thinking and never doing out of fear. This is where Camus disagrees with Pascal, who said that many of the world's problems would be solved if men could sit in their rooms.⁶⁶ Kierkegaard also thought that there was value in pursuit of stillness and inwardness.⁶⁷ Yet Camus believed all those pursuits to be like pulling wool over one's eyes. He finds the idle mind to be fundamentally escapist and impractical:

So long as the mind keeps silent in the motionless world of its hopes, everything is reflected and arranged in the unity of its nostalgia. But with its first move this world cracks and tumbles: an infinite number of shimmering fragments is offered to the understanding. We must despair of ever reconstructing the familiar, calm surface which would give us peace of heart. After so many centuries of inquiries, so many abdications among thinkers, we are well aware that this is true for all our knowledge. With the exception of professional rationalists, today people despair of true knowledge (*TMOS* 18).

The Stranger

At its foundation boredom is connected to one's individuality. Camus accepts that he will always be a stranger to himself, and he presumes that finally answering questions of identity are hopeless:

actually exist, it is only that which it is to become. In so far as the self does not become itself, it is not its own self; but not to be one's own self is despair... The self is in sound health and free from despair only when, precisely by having been in despair, it is grounded transparently in God" (*The Sickness Unto Death*, 29-30).

⁶⁶"All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone." -Blaise Pascal

⁶⁷"For Kierkegaard, the possibility of genuine community begins with the concept of the idea. The idea can be anything. But to be effective it must be able to induce passion and so inwardness, which, to at least some degree, creates individuality... Interpersonal relationships, therefore, are created between people who are committed to the same idea. The idea stands as a "middle term" between them. It unites them through mutual appreciation but equally separates them individually as the idea remains the central subject of their passion" (Kirkpatrick 349).

This world I can touch, and I likewise judge that it exists. There ends all my knowledge, and the rest is construction. For if I try to seize this self of which I feel sure, if I try to define and to summarize it, it is nothing but water slipping through my fingers...This very heart which is mine will forever remain indefinable to me. Between the certainty I have of my existence and the content I try to give to that assurance, the gap will never be filled. Forever I shall be a stranger to myself. In psychology as in logic, there are truths but no truth. Socrates' "Know thyself" has as much value as the "Be virtuous" of our confessionals. They reveal a nostalgia at the same time as an ignorance. They are sterile exercises on great subjects (*TMOS* 19).

It is silly to crave unity while searching for self-truth. But for Camus, it is not only about us knowing ourselves—it is about knowledge of anything. He explains how in our rationalist tendencies, all are reduced and dissolved into sand and dust, leaving us nothing to be certain of or in which to have hope:

All the knowledge on earth will give me nothing to assure me that this world is mine. You describe it to me and you teach me to classify it. You enumerate its laws and in my thirst for knowledge I admit that they are true. You take apart its mechanism and my hope increases. At the final stage you teach me that this wondrous and multicolored universe can be reduced to the atom and that the atom itself can be reduced to the electron. All this is good and I wait for you to continue. But you tell me of an invisible planetary system in which electrons gravitate around a nucleus. You explain this world to me with an image. I realize then that you have been reduced to poetry: I shall never know (Camus 19-20).

The world to Camus cannot be merely explained empirically, as all our senses are able to give us are images of potential truth or reality. Thus, Camus' solution to this vacuum of knowledge is a grandiose "construction" (19) where men become like Don Juans who, while they may never be satisfied, will also never be bored.

Camus' unique stance

Camus veers away from Nietzsche⁶⁸ in his belief that there is a peace to be found not in the will [to power] but its denial.⁶⁹ This denial gives people a fundamental quality of innocence. Camus says, "This world in itself is not reasonable, that is all that can be said" (Camus 21) yet he admits that "there is no happiness if I cannot know" (21). Hence, unhappiness is the fundamental human condition. Yet Camus does not give up. Rather than rejecting reason, he argues that reason has been more under fire than at any other point in history:

But never perhaps at any time has the attack on reason been more violent than in ours. Since Zarathustra's great outburst: "By chance it is the oldest nobility in the world. I conferred it upon all things when I proclaimed that above them no eternal will was exercised," since Kierkegaard's fatal illness, "that malady that leads to death with nothing else following it," the significant and tormenting themes of absurd thought have followed one another. Or at least, and this proviso is of capital importance, the themes of irrational and religious thought. From Jaspers to Heidegger, from Kierkegaard to Chestov, from the phenomenologists to Scheler, on the logical plane and on the moral plane, a whole family of minds related by their nostalgia but opposed by their methods or their aims, have persisted in blocking the royal road of reason and in recovering the direct paths of truth. Here I assume these thoughts to be known and lived. Whatever may be or have been their ambitions, all started out from that indescribable universe where contradiction, antinomy, anguish, or impotence reigns. And what they have in common is precisely the themes so far disclosed. For them, too, it must be said

⁶⁸Camus pushes against Nietzsche's concept of will-to-power, seen throughout the latter's works: "Assuming, finally, that we succeeded in explaining our entire life of drives as the organization and outgrowth of one basic form of will (namely, of the will to power, which is my claim); assuming we could trace all organic functions back to this will to power and find that it even solved the problem of procreation and nutrition (which is a single problem); then we will have earned the right to clearly designate all efficacious force as: will to power. The world seen from inside, the world determined and described with respect to its "intelligible character" - would be just this "will to power" and nothing else. -" (Beyond Good and Evil, Aphorism §36). In this way, Nietzsche advocates for a quest for selfhood driven by will to power. Camus on the other hand denies that such a state of being [selfhood] can truly exist. Nietzsche chooses to forcefully transcend, while Camus advocates for a strategy of peaceful denial.

⁶⁹He says, "what is this condition in which I can have peace only by refusing to know and to live, in which the appetite for conquest bumps into walls that defy its assaults? To will is to stir up paradoxes. Everything is ordered in such a way as to bring into being that poisoned peace produced by thoughtlessness, lack of heart, or fatal renunciations" (TMOS 20).

that what matters above all is the conclusions they have managed to draw from those discoveries” (*TMOS* 22-23).

In Camus’s reasoning, there is no rule but absurdism. This single rule says that there is no actual rule or method to make a man whole, and no real inherent quality or meaningful existence to be found. Again, this declares one particular rule as a universal epistemological foundation—i.e., the rule of acting without certainty of conclusions.

Camus and Kierkegaard

Instead of trying to refute Kierkegaard, Camus fits him into his own absurdist philosophy.⁷⁰ Camus essentially calls Kierkegaard similar to himself, but unlike Camus, Kierkegaard desperately needs an answer. The absurd man has a need but finds nothing in this world to sate it. This is why Kierkegaard and others call upon God to fill this role as a panacea. Camus understands this longing.⁷¹ Yet he looks at the world and does not see God’s unique creations, but jumbled, incoherent, absurdisms. Camus also tries to frame his absurd project in a completely different light than Kierkegaard, who finds boredom inevitably connected to underlying despair. Camus explains that absurd logic, taken to its conclusion, admits that “struggle implies a total absence of hope (which has nothing to do with despair)” (31). He disconnects struggle from despair, thus freeing struggle from despair. It is a slight of hand that conceals the relationship between the two

⁷⁰“Of all perhaps the most engaging, Kierkegaard, for a part of his existence at least, does more than discover the absurd, he lives it...The spiritual adventure that leads Kierkegaard to his beloved scandals begins likewise in the chaos of an experience divested of its setting and relegated to its original incoherence” (*TMOS* 25-26)

⁷¹“He feels within him his longing for happiness and for reason. The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world” (*TMOS* 28).

and makes the relationship unaware of itself. His response is to seek the only happiness and pleasure as to be found in godless, meaningless struggle (31).

Religious escapism vs. Camus' disappearing act

Camus pities the religious and their escapist tactics to existence's absurdity.⁷² He says that in their embrace of the irrational transcendent/mystical, "the absurd becomes God" (33). He seems to find this absurd-becoming-God notion a projection⁷³ (35) and claims that Kierkegaard's work gives God absurd attributes (39). But here is the exact disconnect between the Christian existentialists (such as Kierkegaard) and Camus: his assertion that "The absurd is sin without God" (40). The absurd man accepts the brutal truth that life is despair (41) and so then goes on to suck the marrow out of every distraction and thing he can find. It is a colorful view of meaningless construction.⁷⁴ Even if there is an actual, formulaic way for mankind to escape bored despair, Camus would call it impossible for mankind to know that transcendent meaning (51). Thus in boredom, the absurd man rejects ultimate solutions and makes the most of his state (52). It is like the devil, who celebrates in his newfound kingdom of hell at the beginning of Paradise Lost⁷⁵: "He has forgotten how to hope. This hell of the present is his Kingdom at last...at

⁷²"All of them without exception suggest escape. They deify what crushes them and find reason to hope in what impoverishes them" (TMOS 32).

⁷³Akin to Feuerbach's [projection](#) doctrine

⁷⁴"There is no longer a single idea explaining everything, but an infinite number of essences giving a meaning to an infinite number of objects" (TMOS 45).

⁷⁵"Hail horrors, hail
Infernal world, and thou profoundest Hell
Receive thy new Possessor: One who brings
A mind not to be chang'd by Place or Time.
The mind is its own place, and in it self
Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.
What matter where, if I be still the same,

last man will again find there the wine of the absurd and the bread of indifference on which he feeds his greatness” (*TMOS* 52). This embrace of philosophical constructivism hopes that meaning can be found in such imaginative and constructive indulgence.

The constructive revolt

Man is tempted to leap into escapism and abandon the struggle with Kierkegaard (53) but the truly absurd man bravely revolts.⁷⁶ This is the marvelous act of the absurd human: “That revolt gives life his value...the absurd man can only drain everything to the bitter end, and deplete himself” (55). Without belief in or worry of God, man is fully free to never be bored (56-57). With no hope for future, there is fulness and freedom in the present now (58). Even Camus agrees that the “becoming a self” problem is real: “Man is the only creature who refuses to be what he is.” And yet, one must not worry about becoming a self if there is no such thing. There is a freedom found in man being nothing, and man is the only creature who refuses to be content at being nothing at all. We see this view confirmed in how Camus suggests we live our lives as Don Juans, when “Don Juan has chosen to be nothing” (73). Thus, “He [the Don-Juan actor] abundantly illustrates every month or every day that so suggestive truth that there is no frontier between what a man wants to be and what he is” (79). This freeing hedonism is not just chaos. “‘Everything is permitted’ does not mean that nothing is forbidden” (67). Here again is the contrast between Kierkegaard and Camus’s identity to transcend boredom: “What

And what I should be, all but less than he
Whom Thunder hath made greater? Here at least
We shall be free.” - Satan, *Paradise Lost*

⁷⁶“That revolt is the certainty of a crushing fate [of despair] without the resignation that ought to accompany it” (*TMOS* 54).

Don Juan realizes in action is an ethic of quantity, whereas the saint, on the contrary, tends toward quality. Not to believe in the profound meaning of things belongs to the absurd man” (72). Now, Camus’ Don Juan sounds like Kierkegaard’s seducer⁷⁷. In the absurd world, distraction can give sustenance: as dramas and “appearing creates being” (79). So in a way, distraction *nourishes* and *enriches* being for Camus. It creates a mayfly’s⁷⁸ never-bored existence (80). After all, “the point is to live” (65).

Third option

This is how Camus frames the question of to leap or not to leap: “Choosing between heaven and a ridiculous fidelity, preferring oneself to eternity or [as Kierkegaard did] losing oneself in God is the age-old tragedy in which each must play his part” (83). Here again is the contrast:

There always comes a time when one must choose between contemplation and action. This is called becoming a man. Such wrenches are dreadful. But for a proud heart there can be no compromise. There is God or time, that cross or this sword. This world has a higher meaning that transcends its worries, or nothing is true but those worries. One must live with time and die with it, or else elude it for a greater life. I know that one can compromise and live in the world while believing in the eternal. That is called accepting. But I loathe this term and want all or nothing. If I choose action, don’t think that contemplation is like an unknown country to me. But it cannot give me everything, and, deprived of the eternal, I want to ally myself with time. I do not want to put down to my account either nostalgia or bitterness, and I merely want to see clearly. I tell you, tomorrow you will be mobilized. For you and for me that is a liberation. The individual can do nothing and yet he can do everything. In that wonderful unattached state you understand why I exalt and crush him at one and the same

⁷⁷Author A of *The Seducer’s Diary* section from Kierkegaard’s *Either/Or*.

⁷⁸[This](#) is the life cycle of a mayfly: after hatching, the longest they live is two days before dying. It is akin to Camus’ actor-man: “At the end of his effort his vocation becomes clear: to apply himself wholeheartedly to being nothing or to being several. The narrower the limits allotted him for creating his character, the more necessary his talent. He will die in three hours under the mask he has assumed today. Within three hours he must experience and express a whole exceptional life. That is called losing oneself to find oneself. In those three hours he travels the whole course of the dead-end path that the man in the audience takes a lifetime to cover” (*TMOS* 79-80).

time. It is the world that pulverizes him and I who liberate him. I provide him with all his rights. (*TMOS* 86-87)

Camus explicitly mentions the choice of contemplation vs. action. However, Camus chooses neither. He rejects escapist hope in some abstract beyond, and his stance is a bold, nihilist, absurd bravery in action.⁷⁹ Again, Camus argues that “being deprived of hope is not despairing” (*TMOS* 91).

Heroic Creationism

Camus views the creation of distractions in the hopeless truth of meaningless life and impending death as heroic.⁸⁰ Creating then, is key if a man wants to escape the throes of despair and boredom: “creating is living doubly” (94). It is the ultimate distraction and way of finding fulness in existence. In this, Camus fully supports the notion of ourselves becoming larger-than-life characters, and that these self-created, marvelous actors can be our true selves (77-79). It is a doctrine of identity constructivism that can lead to experiences as close to happiness and freedom as things can be in this world. But it must be understood how Camus views the self or identity of the absurd man who has overcome life’s rules and troubles as innocent.⁸¹ Camus believes that he has approached the

⁷⁹“I maintain my human contradiction. I establish my lucidity in the midst of what negates it. I exalt man before what crushes him, and my freedom, my revolt, and my passion come together then in that tension, that lucidity, and that vast repetition” (88).

⁸⁰“There is thus a metaphysical honor in enduring the world’s absurdity. Conquest or play-acting, multiple loves, absurd revolt are tributes that man pays to his dignity in a campaign in which he is defeated in advance” (93).

⁸¹He explains, “Integrity has no need of rules. There is but one moral code that the absurd man can accept, the one that is not separated from God: the one that is dictated. But it so happens that he lives outside that God. As for the others (I mean also immoralism), the absurd man sees nothing in them but justifications and he has nothing to justify. I start out here from the principle of his innocence” (67).

challenges of our existence with integrity and innocence⁸² and desires unity and wholeness. He finds it through absurd acceptance that we are nothing, but the world is rich with things to struggle with. While Kierkegaard draws inward⁸³ and finds wholeness in God, Camus responds as Sisyphus would—engaging in the empty and struggling world even if it is all temporary and vain.⁸⁴ But let us truly understand why Camus views Sisyphus as a man to model ourselves after:

You have already grasped that Sisyphus is the absurd hero. He *is*, as much through his passions as through his torture. His scorn of the gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life won him that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exerted toward accomplishing nothing...Sisyphus watches the stone rush down in a few moments toward that lower world whence he will have to push it up again toward the summit. He goes back down to the plain. It is during that return, that pause, that Sisyphus interests me. A face that toils so close to stones is already stone itself! I see that man going back down with a heavy yet measured step toward the torment of which he will never know the end. That hour like a breathing-space which returns as surely as his suffering, that is the hour of consciousness. At each of those moments when he leaves the heights and gradually sinks toward the lairs of the gods, he is superior to his fate. He is stronger than his rock. If this myth is tragic, that is because its hero is conscious. Where would his torture be, indeed, if at every step the hope of succeeding upheld him? The workman of today works every day in his life at the same tasks, and this fate is no less absurd. But it is tragic only at the rare moments when it becomes conscious. Sisyphus, proletarian of the gods, powerless and rebellious, knows the whole extent of his wretched condition: it is what he thinks of during his descent. The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory. (Camus 120-121)

And:

I conclude that all is well"...and that remark is sacred. It echoes in the wild and limited universe of man. It teaches that all is not, has not been, exhausted...All

⁸²"My reasoning wants to be faithful to the evidence that aroused it. That evidence is the absurd. It is that divorce between the mind that desires and the world that disappoints, my nostalgia for unity, this fragmented universe and the contradiction that binds them together" (49-50).

⁸³Evans, C. Stephen. "Merold Westphal on the Sociopolitical Implications of Kierkegaard's Thought." P.38

⁸⁴This is the difference between Dr. Rieux and the Priest in Camus' *The Plague*. Dr. Rieux does his best to fight the plague even if it makes no difference (*Plague* 38) while Father Paneloux (a Priest) does not help much in the fight against the disease, rather assuaging his conscience with constant prayer (*Plague* 29).

Sisyphus' silent joy is contained therein. His fate belongs to him. His rock is his thing...Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy. (Camus 122-123)

Blind Spot

We return to Camus' original quandary: what to do about suicide? He ultimately concludes that suicide is a potentially serious act: but such an act is pathetic and illegitimate in a meaningless and absurd world. It would be giving up on finding freedom and happiness in this life. The irony is that Camus' answer to the problem of suicide in *The Myth of Sisyphus* only gives us half-life. Aptly analogized, Bauman explains how a life of ceaseless work and struggle may seem heroic, when in reality it is cowardly and damaging. Such a pace leads to our own disintegration in sacrifice of ourselves.⁸⁵ We have killed our spirits, yet continue to trudge along in life. By intentionally disconnecting our struggle and despair, we prevent ourselves from recognizing it for what it truly is. Camus' method gives men no way to discover the solely *vita activa* life as insufficient, which leads to bored experiences of unaware despair.

⁸⁵Bauman says, "it is the continuation of the running, the gratifying awareness of staying in the race, that becomes the true addiction – not any particular prize waiting for those few who may cross the finishing line...Desire becomes its own purpose, and the sole uncontested and unquestionable purpose. The role of all other purposes, followed up only to be abandoned at the next round and forgotten the round after, is to keep the runner running – after the pattern of 'pace-setters', runners hired by the race managers to run a few rounds only but at the greatest speed they can manage, and then to retire having pulled the other runners to the record-breaking pace, or in the likeness of the auxiliary rockets which, once they have brought the space-ship to the needed velocity, are ejected into space and allowed to disintegrate" (Bauman 73).

The leper

The price of being solid is living an existence of liquid modernity.⁸⁶ Nietzsche claims to transcend good and evil by refusing to believe in such solid truths. Camus also refuses to give them weight on his existence from a qualitative perspective. He opts to quantitatively consume this life to the very fullest.⁸⁷ What we see in the absurd man is not a contented self, but a leper starving to eat any and all kinds of existence as sustenance.

Implications of Liquid Modernism

To give context into what follows, I cite Bauman on how liquid modernity affects individuals:

Modern society exists in its incessant activity of ‘individualizing’ as much as the activities of individuals consist in the daily reshaping and renegotiating of the network of mutual entanglements called ‘society’. Neither of the two partners stays put for long. And so the meaning of ‘individualization’ keeps changing, taking up ever new shapes – as the accumulated results of its past history undermine inherited rules, set new behavioural precepts and turn out ever new stakes of the game. ‘Individualization’ now means something very different from what it meant a hundred years ago and what it conveyed at the early times of the modern era – the times of the extolled ‘emancipation’ of man from the tightly knit tissue of communal dependency, surveillance and enforcement. (Bauman 31)

We now explain how examples of the problem discussed are connected to Western life today. In *The Coddling of the American Mind*, both Greg Lukianoff and

⁸⁶“There exists an obvious fact that seems utterly moral: namely, that a man is always a prey to his truths. Once he has admitted them, he cannot free himself from them. One has to pay something. A man who has be-come conscious of the absurd is forever bound to it” (*TMOS* 31).

⁸⁷“What matters,” said Nietzsche, “is not eternal life but eternal vivacity.” All drama is, in fact, in this choice. Celimene against Elianthe, the whole subject in the absurd consequence of a nature carried to its extreme, and the verse itself, the “bad verse,” barely accented like the monotony of the character’s nature” (*TMOS* 82).

Jonathan Haidt investigate what they call the three great untruths. These three untruths are:

1. “What doesn’t kill you makes you weaker.
2. Always trust your feelings.
3. Life is a battle between good people and evil people” (Lukianoff and Haidt, 4).

Both authors seek to reveal the poison of these three great untruths that our modern Western society has swallowed, explaining how these untruths lead to a society of emotionally crippled [and I assert, bored] people. They believe “many university students are learning to think in [these] distorted ways, and this increases their likelihood of becoming fragile, anxious, and easily hurt” (Lukianoff and Haidt, 9) and outline the dangerous culture of “safetyism” seen in our society today that preaches a gospel of people being inherently fragile.⁸⁸ In their words,

Safetyism” refers to a culture or belief system in which *safety* [open to vague, liquid, abstract interpretation] *has become a sacred value*, which means that people become unwilling to make trade-offs demanded by other practical and moral concerns. “Safety” trumps everything else, no matter how unlikely or trivial the potential danger. When children are raised in a culture of safetyism, which teaches them to stay “emotionally safe” while protecting them *from every imaginable danger*, it may set up a feedback loop: kids become more fragile and less resilient, which signals to adults that they need more protection, which then makes them even more fragile and less resilient. The end result may be similar to what happened when we tried to keep kids safe from exposure to peanuts: a widespread backfiring effect in which the “cure” turns out to be a primary cause of the disease. (Lukianoff and Haidt, 30)

Our society’s “cure” to boredom is often to offer unlimited possibility and distraction (as Camus would suggest). It is what the vague ideas of “making money” and “The American Dream” promise. However, this abstract, conceptually unclear ‘nothingness’ primarily creates boredom. Our aversion and avoidance of solid actualities, keep us bored

⁸⁸Our authors do not only disagree, but believe the opposite is true: that “college students are antifragile, not fragile” (146).

with all that reality has to offer us. While caught in this abstract illusion, we trade reality for detachment.

Horse-blinder truths

Our authors then explain how:

The second Great Untruth—the Untruth of Emotional Reasoning—is a direct contradiction of much ancient wisdom. We opened this chapter with a quotation from the Greek Stoic philosopher Epictetus,⁸⁹ but we could just as easily have quoted Buddha (“Our life is the creation of our mind”) or Shakespeare (“There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so”) or Milton (“The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven”). (Lukianoff and Haidt 34)

Being emotionally driven is dangerous, and yet, this is what liquid modernity has taught us to be. It has taught us to arrogantly trust our solitary emotions as the ultimate means of understanding the world, and that there is no value to be found in social definitions, standards, or opinions. Society becomes irrelevant. Bauman argues that we moderns have begun to view the world as something found within ourselves, rather than outside of us.⁹⁰ The ancient argument that man is a social creature has been thrown aside.

Mental Game

Our authors tell of Boethius in *The Consolation of Philosophy*, explaining how the exercises he [Boethius] goes through “prepares him to accept Lady Philosophy’s

⁸⁹“What really frightens and dismays us is not external events themselves, but the way in which we think about them. It is not things that disturb us, but our interpretation of their significance.” -Epictetus

⁹⁰Bauman explains, “What has been cut apart cannot be glued back together. Abandon all hope of totality, future as well as past, you who enter the world of fluid modernity. The time has arrived to announce, as Alain Touraine has recently done, ‘the end of definition of the human being as a social being, defined by his or her place in society which determines his or her behaviour and actions’. Instead, the principle of the combination of the ‘strategic definition of social action that is not oriented by social norms’ and ‘the defence, by all social actors, of their cultural and psychological specificity’ ‘can be found within the individual, and no longer in social institutions or universalistic principles.’” (Bauman 22).

ultimate lesson: ‘Nothing is miserable unless you think it so, and on the other hand, nothing brings happiness unless you are content with it’” (Lukianoff and Haidt, 34). In this way, our authors suggest how to fight boredom: find community that allows you to live bravely with intensity. After all, whether with oneself or others,

If you engage in this “talking back” process on a regular basis, it becomes easier and easier to do. Over time, the rider becomes a more skillful trainer, and the elephant becomes better trained. The two work together *in harmony*. That is the power and promise of CBT [cognitive behavioral therapy]. (Lukianoff and Haidt, 36)

Harmony with others is what the diseased, bored person lacks. This is the real promise—an interesting life that is chalk-full of meaning.

Nothing Sacred Anymore

Our authors continue, explaining how young people fearful of dangerous ideas and dangerous people will never experience sacred pieces of life. They cite Emile Durkheim,⁹¹ who would agree with Bauman that our culture and promise of individuality are an inherently profane state⁹² (Bauman, 3). Community provides the escape from this

⁹¹“[Emile] Durkheim saw groups and communities as being in some ways like organisms—social entities that have a chronic need to enhance their internal cohesion and their shared sense of moral order. Durkheim described human beings as “homo duplex,” or “two-level man.” We are very good at being individuals pursuing our everyday goals (which Durkheim called the level of the “profane,” or ordinary). But we also have the capacity to transition, temporarily, to a higher collective plane, which Durkheim called the level of the “sacred.” He said that we have access too a set of emotions that we experience only when we are part of a collective—feelings like “collective effervescence,” which Durkheim described as social “electricity” generated when a group gathers and achieves a state of union” (Lukainoff and Haidt, 100).

⁹²“We recall that the famous phrase ‘melting the solids’, when coined a century and a half ago by the authors of The Communist Manifesto, referred to the treatment which the self-confident and exuberant modern spirit awarded the society it found much too stagnant for its taste and much too resistant to shift and mould for its ambitions – since it was frozen in its habitual ways. If the ‘spirit’ was ‘modern’, it was so indeed in so far as it was determined that reality should be emancipated from the ‘dead hand’ of its own history – and this could only be done by melting the solids (that is, by definition, dissolving whatever persists over time and is negligent of its passage or immune to its flow). That intention called in turn for the ‘profaning of the sacred’: for disavowing and dethroning the past, and first and foremost ‘tradition’ – to wit, the sediment and residue of the past in the present; it thereby called for the smashing of the protective armour forged of the beliefs and loyalties which allowed the solids to resist the ‘liquefaction’.” (Bauman,

deluded, illusory state of boredom. Unfortunately, community cannot be had in a society composed of suspended, self-alienated individuals.

Impact Aversion/Avoiding SOLIDarity

Liquid moderns are frightened by intensity and impact.⁹³ We will detach from anything we label as ‘harmful.’ We are frightened of solidity because our society says people are fragile. In liquidity, we are ruled by fear and our desire for survival, so we will dodge and reject solid alternative ideas that would contribute to our feelings of fear and vulnerability. This is dangerous, as “Viewpoint diversity is necessary for the development of critical thinking, while viewpoint homogeneity (whether on the left or the right) leaves a community vulnerable to groupthink and orthodoxy” (Lukianoff and Haidt, 113). Fearful rationalists, we will accept one formula, and one formula only. Rather than the university being a place where students can drink from a river of diverse thoughts, ideas, and dreams, it becomes a place where one idea is accepted and others are feared: and in this way, it is “a [solid] collective entity mobilized for action” (113). For example, fear of “white privilege” and anger towards whites has completely shut down their opinion rather than enabled and opened its doors towards it (115-116). People always want an escape hatch and ability to label and condemn any ‘harmful’ idea to the dustbin. If we could lose the fear and subsequent detachment, emotional solidarity could grow, allowing things to improve.

3). So here we see again see how Bauman’s conclusion matches with Arendt. A profaning of the sacred and a rejection of the *vita contemplativa* was required to move forward towards a vague future.

⁹³“In today’s culture of safetyism, intent no longer matters; only perceived impact does, and thanks to concept creep, just about anything can be perceived as having a harmful—even violent—impact on vulnerable groups” (Lukainoff and Haidt, 105).

In our quest to find ourselves and to discover our identity, social media platforms also contribute to our internal alienation.⁹⁴ Our authors explain that according to recent trends, “Members of iGen⁹⁵ drink less and smoke less; they are safer drivers and are waiting longer to have sex” (148). These abstinences are not necessarily a bad thing. However, if people are not rejecting sin but withdrawing from flesh-and-blood life due to deep fear and anxiety, then that is dangerous. And this seems to be the case.

Social psychologist Jean Twenge explains that “Kids now grow up much more slowly” and “teens today are spending much more time alone interacting with screens⁹⁶” (148). “As Twenge puts it, “18-year-olds now act like 15-year-olds used to, and 13-year-olds like 10-year-olds. Teens are physically safer than ever, yet they are more mentally vulnerable” (148). Now, “this might explain why college students are suddenly asking for more protection and adult interaction in their affairs and interpersonal conflicts” (148). And yet, these facts are correlated to the “rapid rise in rates of anxiety and depression” (149) for teens. These teens are more fearful and more detached from life. Because they are too petrified to enjoy or be attached to anything, their detachment produces depression. This leads to a boredom that stems from their inability to commit towards living a life full of engagement, intensity, and feeling. This is also why it is dangerous for

⁹⁴“By the 2010s, most Americans were using social media sites like Facebook and Twitter, which make it easy to encase oneself within an echo chamber. And then there’s the “filter bubble,” in which search engines and YouTube algorithms are designed to give you more of what you seem to be interested in, leading conservatives and progressives into disconnected moral matrices backed up by mutually contradictory informational worlds” (131).

⁹⁵*iGen* is also known as the “Post-Millennial” or “Gen-Z” age group

⁹⁶Twenge (2017), chapter 2

us to identify as bored or depressed⁹⁷ people. The adolescent suicide rate has been doubling and tripling (150-151), and this problem is the ailing of the spirit manifesting itself.

Boredom and Psyche

Boredom can be described as a disease of identity. The link between boredom and depression is further demonstrated in the rise of mental illness diagnosis. Students are statistically identifying with the belief that they suffer from mental illness (Lukianoff and Haidt 156-157). Defeated in spirit, these students are resigned⁹⁸ and bored. Furthermore, their solitary alienation leads to a vicious cycle of aggravated mistrust, fear, and hostility.⁹⁹ Our abstract age encourages such alienated individuality and dissolution. The liquid modern problem of unhinged options and variety has encouraged these disorders and feelings of being aloof, alone, and depressed.¹⁰⁰ It is not good for man to be alone, yet we train our young to detach from experience due to often-irrational fears.¹⁰¹ Liquid

⁹⁷“If depression becomes part of your identity, then over time you’ll develop corresponding schemas about yourself and your prospects (*I’m no good and my future is hopeless*). These schemas will make it harder for you to marshal the energy and focus to take on challenges that, if you were to master them, would weaken the grip of depression” (Lukianoff and Haidt 150).

⁹⁸Furthermore, “repeated failures to escape from what is perceived to be a bad situation can create a mental state that psychologist Martin Seligman called “learned helplessness,” in which a person believes that escape is impossible and therefore stops trying, even in new situations where effort would be rewarded” (Lukianoff and Haidt 158).

⁹⁹“When people are depressed, or when their anxiety sets their threat-response system on high alert...they are more likely to see hostility in benign or even benevolent people, communications, and situations” (Lukianoff and Haidt 159).

¹⁰⁰“The disintegration of the traditional social structures and the narcissistic emphasis on the “I” lead to the disintegration of psychic structures: boredom is read as a modern identity crisis” (Dalle Pezze and Salzani 19-20). This fits well next to Zygmunt Bauman’s teaching.

¹⁰¹Our authors explain, “efforts to protect kids from risk by preventing them from gaining *experience*—such as walking to school, climbing a tree, or using sharp scissors—are different. Such protections come with costs, as kids miss out on opportunities to learn skills, independence, and risk assessment” (Lukianoff and Haidt 169). Lenore Skenazy says that: “The problem with this ‘everything is

modernity is this societal pressure that says that impact and intensity should be avoided: “When children are repeatedly led to believe that the world is dangerous and that they cannot face it alone, we should not be surprised if many of them believe it” (179). If fear of impact is depriving us from real, flesh and blood interaction with others, which impairs our human development, particularly in regards to “the art of association” (211). Our authors explain that in human development, “the linguistic brain is “expecting” certain kinds of input, and children are therefore motivated to engage in back-and-forth reciprocal exchanges with...later anxiety and depression¹⁰²”(182-183). Our authors argue that

“Free play helps children develop the skills of cooperation and dispute resolution that are closely related to the “art of association” upon which democracies depend. When citizens are not skilled in this art, they are less able to work out the ordinary conflicts of daily life. They will more frequently call for authorities to apply coercive force to their opponents. *They will be more likely to welcome the bureaucracy of safetyism*” (Lukianoff and Haidt, 194).

Bureaucracy and boredom

Liquid modernity and limitlessness can push people towards desiring tyranny or centralized autocracy.¹⁰³ Students want the freedom to operate in their own room, but they want to keep the door locked. They prioritize safety, above all else. Their room

dangerous’ outlook [and so in liquid fashion, we should elusively avoid it all] is that over-protectiveness is a danger in and of itself¹⁰¹)” (169). “Skenazy says that societal pressures often prompt parents to engage in “worst-first thinking¹⁰¹”(Lukianoff and Haidt 171).

¹⁰²Gray, P. (2011). The decline of play and the rise of psychopathology in children and adolescents. *American Journal of Play*, 3(4), 443-463.

¹⁰³Here is a disturbing trend: “Around 2013, Greg [Lukainoff] began to notice a change. More students seemed to be in agreement with administrators that *they were unsafe*, that many aspects of students’ lives *needed to be carefully regulated by adults*, and that it was far better to *overreact to potential risks and threats* than to underreact” (200).

could be a prison or a deluded Cartesian room, yet they would feel content. It is precisely the detached and depressed man that dominating leaders like the Grand Inquisitor¹⁰⁴ or *Big Brother*¹⁰⁵ will be able to prey on:

If members of iGen have been risk-deprived and are therefore more risk averse, then it is likely that they have a lower bar for what they see as daunting or threatening. They will see more ordinary life tasks as beyond their ability to handle on their own without help from an adult [or narcissist tyrant who tells them exactly what to do and how to live by controlling every inch of their existences].” (185)

Liquid interpretation in abusive hands could lead to a strangling superstructure of solidarity: a sick, domineering bureaucracy. Our self-indulgence of liquid modern identity could end up leading us into willing slavery, with such domination and control completely justified in the name of safety, survival, and good intentions.¹⁰⁶ This is “the epitome of safetyism: if we can prevent *one* child from getting hurt, we should deprive *all* children of slightly risky play” (236). The fearful, anxious, liquid-elusive man cannot help but oblige.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴From Book 5, Chapter 5 of *The Brothers Karamazov*

¹⁰⁵From George Orwell’s *1984*

¹⁰⁶“Drawing on Durkheim, and to a lesser degree on Marx, the mass society theorists argued that industrialization and modernity estranged citizens from one another, leaving them rootless and searching for ways of belonging. Ripped from their traditional moorings, masses were available for mobilization by extremist movements—unless, that is, individuals could develop communal bonds through organizational affiliations and involvement” (Berman, 404). While Berman is not one of these mass society theorists, she does an excellent job of summarizing their views. Such theorists made this argument (at least, Arendt did) by saying that with modernization came the abandonment of a life lived in simultaneous pursuit of both the “*vita activa*” and the “*vita contemplativa*.” Modernization ushered in sentiments that in efficiency and productivity deemed only the “*vita activa*” as economical, practical, and relevant to existence. Thus, alienation would inevitably happen unless there were institutions and opportunities for people to think, feel, and be more than just cog-in-the-machine workers.

¹⁰⁷People become sheep, ripe for domination and slaughter, when they “come to rely on external authorities to resolve their problems, and over time, “their willingness or ability to use other forms of conflict management may atrophy” (Lukainoff and Haidt, 210).

Academic Tedium

In fear for survival, some parents subject their kids to formulaic path-to-success methods that will get them into great colleges rather than letting them grow into real, complex, flesh-and-blood selves.¹⁰⁸ This echoes Oakeshott's discussion of technical knowledge being the rationalist's abstract and formulaic ticket to success and also brings us to the idea of grit.¹⁰⁹ As mentioned earlier, boredom is "existence without quality"¹¹⁰, and, according to Camus, Sisyphus is happy. Camus wants us to find beauty in the struggle, and we might as well call that struggle 'grit'. But it lacks quality.

Guilty Until Proven Innocent

By indulging sentiments that tell us our feelings are always right, we create a "guilty until proven innocent" culture that alienates us from each other. "Young people have come to believe that danger lurks everywhere" (Lukainoff and Haidt, 204) and this fear makes our world a profane one of survival. We have thrown out the sacred, objective standards of good and bad for 'dangerous and not-dangerous.' This is distinctly and

¹⁰⁸"Opportunities for self-direction, social exploration, and scientific discovery are increasingly lost to direct instruction in the core curriculum...for children of many educated parents with means, instead of afternoons and weekends spent hanging out with friends or resting, that non-school time is increasingly used to cultivate skills that will allow those children to stand out later on in the college admissions game" (Lukianoff and Haidt 189).

¹⁰⁹"Some of these parents may think that making sure their children do whatever it takes to succeed in advanced courses helps their children develop "grit." But "grit is often misunderstood as perseverance without passion, and that's tragic," psychology professor Angela Duckworth, author of the book *Grit*, told us. "perseverance without passion is mere drudgery." She wants young people to "devote themselves to pursuits that are intrinsically fulfilling" (190).

¹¹⁰"The most thorough and complete philosophical investigation of boredom to date is however Elizabeth Goodstein's *Experience Without Qualities: Boredom and Modernity* (2005), which we have used widely used for this introduction...she calls [boredom] an "experience without quality." She thus emphasizes that the very social and cultural changes that characterize modernity are the same that led to the "democratization" of boredom: modernity and boredom are shown to [be] inextricably connected and inseparable" (Dalle Pezze and Salzani 21).

inherently alienating and is built on fear of the world beyond us. If we are taught that the answers to our troubles can be discovered within ourselves,¹¹¹ there are further and rational justifications to become lonely, isolated people, marooned and self-sentenced to imprisonment¹¹² on our own distant islands and shores: becoming bored people who are fearful (and thus, self-alienating and escapist) of truly engaging reality.

Monsters and Genocide

We must avoid becoming the rational intellectual who narrowly views the world and discredits everything that contradicts that narrow viewpoint. In formulaic fantasy, this intellectual reduces the world to fit his equation and throws all the variables that do not fit into the dustbin. This is how banal genocides start, as Stanford Professor Saikat Majumdar explains in *Boredom and the Banality of Power*.¹¹³ Ambitious leaders and thinkers repeatedly try to perfecting the rational formula, and yet millions of people die every time. As Solzhenitsyn said, “The line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.” Anyone can become a monster, and we should not pretend that

¹¹¹If we believe that we do not need society to find happiness or to find meaning, then we again slip into an unaware boredom.

¹¹²“What emerges from the fading social norms is naked, frightened, aggressive ego in search of love and help. In the search for itself and an affectionate sociality, it easily gets lost in the jungle of the self. ... Someone who is poking around in the fog of his or her own self is no longer capable of noticing that this isolation, this ‘solitary-confinement of the ego’ is a mass sentence” (Bauman 37).

¹¹³“Genocide is murder touched by modernity. A fury of passion, Zygmunt Bauman has argued unforgettably in *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1991), might help you kill sixty people. To kill six million, however, passion is irrelevant. What you need is a bureaucracy. Drain the horror, empty the pity and terror. Bring in the filing cabinets. Be clinically indifferent. Killing, Eichmann had uttered business-like, is a medical matter. If Renaissance humanism had dethroned the fury of the supernatural and introduced human beings as the true protagonists of Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy, the Enlightenment re-carved the human soul with the corporeal body of reason: the machine. And the filing cabinet. And so the banalisation of mass-death becomes the gift of modernity. Killing becomes not only a medical matter but a boring one as well. The rhythms of the machine, the obsessive focus on interior spaces, the banal details of the filing cabinet, render bare the inevitable centrality of boredom. Boredom becomes one of the defining conditions of modernity, an essential part of the affective identity of the modern individual fixated on banal details” (*Boredom Studies Reader*, 159).

we would never stoop so low. At some point, we either become the victim or executioner. Detachment from intensity, beauty, and this life dehumanizes us to the point of perversity.

The University's loss of Teleology

Liquid modernity has even undermined the entire point of the university. Traditionally, the telos of a university was truth (Lukainoff and Haidt, 254). Yet Karl Marx upended the [traditional, truth-seeking] academy with these words: "Philosophers have hitherto only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it."¹¹⁴ His influence and gospel has taken root in the modern world.¹¹⁵ The desire not to find the truth but change it proves disastrous, because if we are not careful, the liquidity hardens into rationalist, mechanistic solid structure that we may not like.¹¹⁶ Ironically, the anti-intellectual Marxian has become the intellectual. Truth does not matter so much as practicality in an always-changing world. The Machiavellian viewpoint promised support, understanding, safety, and success as long as we behave in a certain way, yet it actually delivers a technical, methodical, practical worldview from which we teach young children not to run, eat peanuts, or take risks.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴Marx, [*Theses on Feuerbach*](#).

¹¹⁵"Some students and faculty today seem to think that the purpose of scholarship is to bring about social change, and [that] the purpose of education is to train students to more effectively bring about such a change" (Lukainoff and Haidt, 254).

¹¹⁶"If a university is united around a telos of change or social progress, scholars will be motivated to reach conclusions that are consistent with that vision, and the community will impose social costs on those who reach different conclusions" (Lukainoff and Haidt, 254).

¹¹⁷As the adage goes, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions."

In a liquid modern world, humanity become suspended from being anything. Camus' answer to the problem of incurable boredom was suspension of oneself from the choices and qualitative issues of reality, diving into the quantitative instead. Bauman succinctly explains the problem of liquid modernity when he says

Let me repeat: there is a wide and growing gap between the condition of individuals *de jure* and their chances to become individuals *de facto* – that is, to gain control over their fate and make the choices they truly desire. It is from that abysmal gap that the most poisonous effluvia contaminating the lives of contemporary individuals emanate. (Bauman 39)

Scholars Barbara Dalle Pezze and Carlo Salzani explain in their compilation of *Essays on Boredom and Modernity* that “Boredom can be related to *Erlebnis*¹¹⁸: it is the “malady” that accompanies the disintegration of the traditional forms of experience, which [Walter] Benjamin called the “atrophy of experience.” Boredom is thus related to the notions of overstimulation, shock, repetition, the reification and mechanization of time, the eternal return of the same, novelty, and so on. These notions are an inescapable feature of modern life. We will next examine Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting For Godot* as a literary tale illustrating this tedious boredom that is further exacerbated by liquid modernity.

¹¹⁸Defined as “momentary experience.” Stands in contrast to the concept of *Erfahrung*, or “momentous experience” (Pezze and Salzani, 25).

CHAPTER THREE

Examples of the Problem

The previous discussions of the problem of boredom's origins and scope can greatly inform our analysis of Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot*.¹¹⁹ In *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon want to talk to Godot largely because they want to know who they ARE. The unobserved 'Godot' should be understood as God.¹²⁰ Humor is Beckett's¹²¹ method of choice in communicating the tale *Waiting for Godot*, and it is relevant to boredom.

Something abstract bothers Vladimir and Estragon (Beckett 2-4).¹²² All they want is something to pass the time. They will agree to fodder they do not give a damn about (such as the Crucifixion story) but tolerate it so long as "It'll pass the time" (5). Our first reference to Godot is Vladimir explaining to Estragon why they must stay where they are (6). Rather than pass the time with distraction or travel, they must remain idle and stationary. This is made more challenging by the fact that neither man really seems to care or take interest in the surrounding world.

¹¹⁹In a poll conducted by [the British Royal National Theatre](#) in 1998/99, *Waiting For Godot* was [voted](#) the "most significant English language play of the 20th century."

¹²⁰According to many scholars and critics of the play Godot should be understood [in this way](#).

¹²¹Beckett largely wrote as a response to Kant (Dalle Pezze and Salzani, 24).

¹²²Like Kierkegaard's character in *The Diapsalmata*, who is "too bothered to do anything" we see Estragon tugging on his bothersome boot—starting and stopping before concluding "nothing to be done" (Beckett 2).

Both Estragon and Vladimir are listless, careless and lost. Vladimir angrily says to his companion that “nothing is certain when you’re about” (7). When Vladimir asks if Estragon recognizes where they are, Estragon says that it makes no difference whether their location familiar or not. Both have gotten so lost in the thickets of their own muddled minds that they cannot say what day of the week it is. They question everything about their reality and do not recognize where they stand.

They are also fragile and doubt their ability to bear burdens. When Estragon asks Vladimir, “who am I to tell my private nightmares to if I can’t tell them to you?” Vladimir responds “Let them remain private. You know I can’t bear that” (9). There is a shying away from hard, fast, firm stances and answers here. They are spineless and aimless. Both characters do not even enjoy the presence of others (and show an unwillingness to dig into their own selves) because of their voracious, insatiable desire to pursue wanderlust and the glittering but ambiguous future that “wayfarers” on a journey are promised.¹²³

What follows is a startling but perfect example of what is happening today. There is such an impatient inability to wait that people would rather off themselves that tolerate boredom any longer:

“VLADIMIR:

What do we do now?

ESTRAGON:

Wait.

VLADIMIR:

Yes, but while waiting.

ESTRAGON:

What about hanging ourselves?

¹²³They long for “The beauty of the way...the goodness of the wayfarers” (Beckett 9). This echoes Alan Watts on the Western world’s desire for abstraction and anti-materialism in his essays “*Does It Matter?: Essays on Man’s Relation to Materiality.*”

VLADIMIR:

Hmm. It'd give us an erection" (10).

And yet, the waiting, however horrible and intolerable it is, continues for Vladimir and Estragon because of their fear-driven preference for inactivity. They prefer to be safe, even if the result is a bored, shallow, pitiful life.¹²⁴ Jeremiah 10:1-5¹²⁵ preaches that the nations have in vanity constructed idols that are 'safe.' They are safe because they have no ability to do bad or good. They are lukewarm. They are inactive, stagnant, and have shielded themselves in glittering boxes. The story of these idols is what we see in our two men here. They are fearful to their core. This fear drives them to inactivity and a bored existence superficially explained by lack of behavior and aversion to engaging human existence.

And here is another entendre to how boredom and liquid-modern society can lead to tyrannical bureaucracies:

¹²⁴VLADIMIR:

Well? What do we do?

ESTRAGON:

Don't let's do anything. It's safer" (11).

¹²⁵Jeremiah 10:1-5 says

"Hear the word that the Lord speaks to you, O house of Israel. ² Thus says the Lord:

"Learn not the way of the nations,
nor be dismayed at the signs of the heavens
because the nations are dismayed at them,

³ for the customs of the peoples are vanity.

A tree from the forest is cut down
and worked with an axe by the hands of a craftsman.

⁴ They decorate it with silver and gold;
they fasten it with hammer and nails
so that it cannot move.

⁵ Their idols are like scarecrows in a cucumber field,
and they cannot speak;
they have to be carried,
for they cannot walk.

Do not be afraid of them,
for they cannot do evil,
neither is it in them to do good."

“ESTRAGON:
We've lost our rights?
VLADIMIR:
(distinctly). We got rid of them” (13).

Both men have got rid of their rights because they were so bored. They began to chase carrots just as men chase money. While eating the carrot, both men discuss moderation. One feels worse in excess (Estragon), and the other [Vladimir] just makes himself apathetic and lukewarm about it, saying “I get used to the muck as I go along” (15). Clearly, the leper narrative emerges here. Ironically both men are so dissatisfied and hoping for something to change in their bothersome existence, they give up and label themselves as inert men, in a pit with no way out.¹²⁶ And yet, it is not that they remain at rest in their inertness. They are tortured in the stagnancy. They cannot commit. They are indecisive. They are inactive.¹²⁷

Suddenly, Pozzo appears. Our men are so hungry for Godot, they will call anyone (even this cruel man) the long-awaited figure (16). This Pozzo explains to both Estragon and Vladimir that he would take bad, imperfect, even perverse community over none at all.¹²⁸ Now, the introduction of the beastly “Lucky,” an animal-man who carries Pozzo’s

¹²⁶“ESTRAGON:
No use struggling.
VLADIMIR:
One is what one is.
ESTRAGON:
No use wriggling.
VLADIMIR:
The essential doesn't change” (15).

¹²⁷In abstraction, such men cannot even properly participate in the *vita activa* now. They have gone from being active and contemplative, to merely formulaic and active, to merely nothing: neither active or contemplative, but lost in immaterial dreams and abstractions.

¹²⁸“I cannot go for long without the society of my likes...even when the likeness is an imperfect one” (Beckett 18).

bags and walks on a leash, is significant. His physical state is akin to our two characters' spiritual ailment, though they do not realize it. Unaware, Estragon asks "what ails him [Lucky]?" (19) when it is the expression and manifestation of the same sickness he himself inwardly suffers. They are tired and bored men, so apathetic to their true ailments that they do not know how to set them down (19). In a nod to Camus, Lucky embodies the Sisyphean man, devoted and burdened solely to the *vita activa*. He's a dying beast,¹²⁹ or at least looks the part (20). Pozzo refuses to let him speak.¹³⁰ In the name of rest, Lucky is left silent and alone, never to be asked questions as a man would be.¹³¹ Now, when Estragon asks for the scraps of bone to gnaw, Lucky acquiesces, or at least does not reply. This worries Pozzo, as if something is changing in Lucky's mind.¹³² The thought of Lucky gaining agency or personality frightens Pozzo.

This discussion of how personal agency frees individuals parallels Frederick Douglass's discussion of how African Americans were kept mentally enslaved beyond the physical plantations they were chained to. Masters would get their slaves extremely drunk (and thus, docile) whenever they had a "vacation." It preserved them as chattel who were via substance abuse stifled from thinking for themselves.¹³³ Lucky's refusal of the bone is as if these slaves looked at their master with an expression that declared "no

¹²⁹Estragon and Vladimir point to his neck and find an oozing sore. Estragon mutters "it's inevitable" about the rope and sore on his neck, and it feels as if he is speaking to the audience.

¹³⁰"Can't you see that he wants to rest?" (Beckett 21).

¹³¹Vladimir compares Pozzo's treatment of Lucky as to one who eats a banana and carelessly throws away the skin (Beckett 26): a perfect analogy for our utilitarian, *vita activa* age which primarily cares about efficiency.

¹³²"I've never known him to refuse a bone before" (Beckett 21).

¹³³From Chapter 18 of *My Bondage and My Freedom* (Frederick Douglass)

more rum anymore.” Perhaps there was a human self-buried within Lucky’s depths. But with a wave, Pozzo says “I must be getting on. Thank you for your society” (22). For Pozzo, society and community are transactional. They are not stable or loyal, but individualist. They selfishly fluctuate to meet the individual’s needs.¹³⁴

Pozzo utters the defining statement of our generation when he says, “I am perhaps not particularly human, but who cares?” (Beckett 22). For Pozzo [and for liquid moderns like ourselves] friendship has devolved into something so shallow that one’s quantity of interactions¹³⁵ begin to measure the supposedly intimate construct of friendship. Pozzo has lots of ‘friends’ because he needs such variety...and justifies it with self-centered pursuit of learning: finding transcendence in their presence, and then consuming that like drink.¹³⁶ Meeting more people—chewing on existences—takes the edge off Pozzo’s lust for life. It is how Camus’ absurdist lives.

Now, Pozzo dreads the question of why Lucky won’t set down the bags.¹³⁷ In Lucky’s conduct we see the nihilist’s perspective. Pozzo explains, “He wants to impress

¹³⁴Pozzo’s perverse understanding of society echoes Bauman’s point in *Liquid Modernity* when he says “Though the reasons to watch it closely might not have disappeared, society is now primarily the condition which individuals strongly need, yet badly miss – in their vain and frustrating struggle to reforge their de jure status into the genuine autonomy and capacity for self-assertion. This is, in the broadest of outlines, the predicament which sets the present-day tasks of critical theory – and, more generally, social critique. They boil down to tying together once more what the combination of formal individualization and the divorce between power and politics have torn asunder. In other words, to redesign and repopulate the now largely vacant agora – the site of meeting, debate and negotiation between the individual and the common, private and public good” (Bauman 40-41).

¹³⁵Pozzo mutters “if this goes on much longer we’ll soon be old friends” (Beckett 22).

¹³⁶“**POZZO:** I too would be happy to meet him. The more people I meet the happier I become. From the meanest creature one departs wiser, richer, more conscious of one’s blessings. Even you . . . (*he looks at them ostentatiously in turn to make it clear they are both meant*) . . . even you, who knows, will have added to my store” (Beckett 23).

¹³⁷“**POZZO:** A moment ago you were calling me Sir, in fear and trembling. Now you’re asking me questions. No good will come of this!” (23). This could be a direct reference to Kierkegaardian transformation, which he clearly scorns.

me, so that I'll keep him...He imagines that when I see how well he carries I'll be tempted to keep him on in that capacity" (24). If this is true, then Lucky is trying to be like Camus' *Sisyphus*. He wants to impress and dazzle others in the mighty struggle he undergoes. He wants to impress Pozzo, so that he is loved and so that Pozzo will "keep him" (24). Lucky carries a giant, backbreaking load, just as "Atlas, son of Jupiter" (24) did. Yet all this carrying and backbreaking slog for poor Lucky is "In reality...not his job" (24). 'The struggle' may not really be humanity's trade, purpose, or job either. And Lucky is sad, but he is even more unwilling to have anyone feel pity or empathy for him. He accelerates and encourages detachment and isolation by hurting others who try to help him (25). Yet Pozzo preaches a balanced dualism that makes us dismiss good and evil, laughter and tears—they will always remain in flux. In this sense, Pozzo views both emotional expressions as neither bad nor good, simply something to be balanced. He calls the not-speaking of it (neither bad nor good) "beautiful" (26). In his language of things being "common," Pozzo rejects *haecceitas*¹³⁸ and the divine in favor of the base, rejecting it all in the name of grandiosity.¹³⁹ He would find the boring, empty, and blurred pretty, and the blank world beautiful.

The enslaved Lucky, whose head is full of matted white hair, looks old. Pozzo, upon taking off his hat, is completely bald. With proud composure, Pozzo alludes that

¹³⁸The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins often incorporated the ideas of the technical philosopher Duns Scotus into his theology and poetry: "One of these was the concept of *haecceitas*, or 'thisness'. *Haecceitas* inhered in every created thing, inanimate, animal or human. It was the mark of its Creation by God, and it was active. So it was lived out in action and in movement: each thing veered towards a particular destiny or purpose. This process involved the will, the expression of individuality (whereas the intellect marks a common humanity)." -from Crossref-it.info article on *Inscape* and *Instress*.

¹³⁹"**POZZO:** But for him all my thoughts, all my feelings, would have been of common things" (Beckett 26).

because he is bald, he cannot seem old (26). You cannot suffer if you cannot feel. It views the lack of something as an advantage or a superpower. Suddenly Pozzo lapses into another state. He is emotionally agitated and in obvious pain. Soon, the episode ends. Pozzo reassures Estragon and Vladimir that he is not mad or a man that suffers. He returns to being unaware and seems to have no recollection of the outburst that just occurred. Beckett perhaps implies that demonic forces attacked Pozzo (27). Or maybe they were angels awaking the pathetic man to the reality of his cruel treatment and rampant, abhorrent self-victimization.

During all this, Vladimir absurdly call the evening charming. He asserts that it is better than the circus and music concert but also recognizes it to be an awful nightmare (27). This shows how intolerable life has become for him and Estragon. Soon, Estragon calls Pozzo “A scream”¹⁴⁰ (27). When Vladimir disappears (and Pozzo is upset by this) Estragon explains how Vladimir “would have burst” if he stayed. Pozzo understands with accommodating spirit. It is a continuation of a reactionary response already seen in the narrative: that it is unreasonable to expect others to bear burdens. Others are too fragile, and it would be unkind to make them do so. Only Sisyphean beasts like Lucky can handle such backbreaking loads. If the burden hurts, then no need to give it to anyone else. Beyond additional burdens though, our man Pozzo does not know how to sit down. He himself is a Sisyphus who does not know any other path than perpetually pushing the boulder (28-29). When Pozzo consults his watch to keep up with his schedule and Vladimir flatly asserts “time has stopped” (29). Pozzo responds “whatever you like, but

¹⁴⁰Immediately makes one think of the anxious Edvard Munch’s “the Scream,” and how anxiety plays a large part in conversations about boredom and nihilism.

not that” (29). Pozzo cannot bear the thought of time being out of order, as time makes the Sisyphean load tolerable. Without time, there is no tolerance for a brutal schedule and grinding labor, which is why Pozzo finds the thought of no time anymore dreadful. Time having stopped may be our protagonists’ justification for their inability to change.

Our story takes an ominous twist. Pozzo mutters “you don’t know what our twilights can do. Shall I tell you?” (29) It is the same questioning that Satan used in Eden. Estragon even calls himself “Adam” a few lines down. The concept of twilight echoes of promises made to Faust when entering *Walpurgis Night*.¹⁴¹ It is as if Pozzo is promising the glorious poison our Western world has guzzled: the abstracted, ambiguous, shiny dream of what one’s imagination could be. But Pozzo speaks of the night, saying “behind this veil of gentleness and peace, night is charging (vibrantly) and will burst upon us (snaps his fingers) pop! like that! (his inspiration leaves him) just when we least expect it. (Silence. Gloomily.) That’s how it is on this bitch of an earth” (29). Here we see despair. The end of day and of everything is unavoidable. Estragon and Vladimir react to this damning and inevitable truth by not worrying but waiting. To them, we can apathetically suffer and slog through this life towards guaranteed end, and we can detach in hope of abstract future beyond the future’s promise of “night”. By doing this, we can endure. We can wait. “Simply wait. We’re used to it” (30). It echoes frustration and “waiting” rather than pursuing the Beloved Unknown¹⁴² with full energy and force.

After all this, Pozzo amusingly asks our two men how they found him. If life’s a Don Juan play (as Camus preaches that it is such a game, full of different masks) then

¹⁴¹From *Faust, Part I* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

¹⁴²As Geier describes it in *On the Beloved Unknown and the Learning Soul*

how did our men like Pozzo's performance? In paraphrase, he asks 'How did you like the character that I served up to you?' (30). After all, for our characters, satisfaction is found in distraction and entertainment.¹⁴³ Without such things all is blank and dull.

This is further supported by this following passage:

“POZZO:
Gentlemen, you have been . . . civil to me.
ESTRAGON:
Not at all!
VLADIMIR:
What an idea!” (30).

Civility is boring. Thus, this comment to our protagonists is deemed offensive. Yet, Pozzo sees the dull and tedious time our men are having (33) and asks if he can do anything to help. He asks about their earlier conversation, and whether they found it interesting—“is it enough?” (31). Pozzo feels generous in his desire to help the two bored men and explains “I am liberal. It's my nature this evening” (31). It makes us again ask the question: Who is Pozzo? Is he a Dionysian spirit? Who did Beckett design him to be? At the very least, he seems to be a shape-shifter—a liquid modern, whose nature changes every moment. He wonders how far he will have to go to sate these two. Will hanging be the only thing that could give them an erection? In this, Pozzo sounds like the Devil—at least, Ivan's devil¹⁴⁴ from *The Brothers Karamazov*.

The men tell Pozzo that they would like to see the burdened Lucky dance and think (31). Pozzo explains how Lucky used to dance with joy, but now all he can perform is “The net. He thinks he's entangled in a net” (32). Life used to be a dance of intensity

¹⁴³This is akin to the poet Juvenal's condemnation of Roman society being enamoured with “bread and circuses.”

¹⁴⁴Reference to Book XI, Chapter 9 of *The Brothers Karamazov*. The devil tells Ivan he exists not only as a foil to God but as the chaotic being that keeps the world interesting for humankind.

for Lucky, but now it's a bother. He used to find joy and freedom in it, but now he is tangled and frustrated: just as how Estragon and Vladimir keep checking their hats for that something that bugs them. So Lucky puts down his bags down to dance—for such a thing, the burdens are set aside (32). Even in preparation for this though, nothing is happening. “Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful!” (33). Pozzo then explains that for Lucky to think, you must “give him his hat” (33). It is as if Pozzo says “Give him his dignity and he will think. He will try to be a man again.” Finally, ‘Lucky’ shouts his thoughts (34). He thinks so much, but so jumbled, unclearly, and deludedly. And no one cares enough to help him sort it out.

Parts of his incoherent rant sound like T.S. Eliot's condemnation of modernity when he speaks of decent men and lost golf balls in *Choruses From the Rock*.¹⁴⁵ Yet Pozzo cannot stand to hear Lucky think. He takes his hat, trampling on it to shut him up and end the ramble. Lucky is a jumbled, abstracted monster. Perhaps bored men cannot tolerate the burdening, messy thoughts of each other, or at least of monsters? (35) And yet, ending a man's thinking will kill him, as we see with Lucky in this story (35). He goes limp with the stamping of his hat and close of this tirade. If he is alive, he has been damned: no longer free to think.

Abruptly, all say their adieus to each other. Yet Pozzo exclaims, “I don't seem to be able . . . (long hesitation) . . . to depart” (38) to which Estragon responds, “such is life” (38). Perhaps Pozzo cannot depart because he is not an actual noun or solid state of existence—any actual *thing*. When one is not solid, they cannot go from black to white.

¹⁴⁵Compare the two phrases: Lucky saying “flying gliding golf over nine and eighteen holes tennis of all sorts in a word for reasons unknown” and Eliot speaking of how the result of modern men's wasted time is “...lost golf balls.”

They are stuck in a grey river, drowning. Or maybe it is just so hard for our men to begin or end anything. In a strange, nostalgic, sentimental lukewarmness, we make ourselves (while still within an objective time) unable to tolerate beginnings or endings. It all becomes a mush. Yet, when Pozzo finally leaves, Vladimir is pathetically satisfied with summing up the relationship by saying “that passed the time” (38).

With Pozzo’s leave, the two men are back to their original predicament of dull and stagnant boredom:

“ESTRAGON:

Let's go.

VLADIMIR:

We can't.

ESTRAGON:

Why not?

VLADIMIR:

We're waiting for Godot.

ESTRAGON:

(despairingly). Ah! Pause.

VLADIMIR:

How they've changed! ESTRAGON:

Who?

VLADIMIR:

Those two.

ESTRAGON:

That's the idea, let's make a little conversation.

VLADIMIR:

Haven't they?

ESTRAGON:

What?

VLADIMIR:

Changed.

ESTRAGON:

Very likely. They all change. Only we can't.

VLADIMIR:

Likely! It's certain” (39).

Again, we see our characters comment on their supposed inability to change.

They are like fallen, alienated gods. They perceive themselves as solid, yet long to be

liquid modern—perhaps like Pozzo. But it is a self-ignorant and arrogant idea that “They all change. Only we can’t.” Yet, Estragon cannot even recognize the people that supposedly changed, hinting that these changeable, malleable people are SO in flux that every interaction makes them unrecognizable.¹⁴⁶

Suddenly, a boy appears. This child being a messenger draws images of Nietzsche’s theory of creative transformation,¹⁴⁷ where the ultimate transformative expression is the curious child and the childlike spirit. He tells them that Godot will come tomorrow, and that while Godot is good to him (he is a goat-keeper) Godot beats his brother who minds the sheep. This idea of a shepherd brother should cause us to draw parallels to Christ (aka the Good Shepherd¹⁴⁸). He minds those animals who will eat anything for the sake of a full stomach, just as bored people will do anything to escape their tedium. It is curious that Godot beats the shepherd, the goat boy’s brother. Is this a critique at the Church or Jesus? Perhaps Godot is hard on his brother, who is the shepherd of the Christian flock, because he holds more responsibility. Perhaps a level discipline and pain forces us to think and improve, which would reaffirm the Biblical concept of the

¹⁴⁶“**ESTRAGON:**

But I don't know them.

VLADIMIR:

Yes you do know them.

ESTRAGON:

No I don't know them.

VLADIMIR:

We know them, I tell you. You forget everything. (*Pause. To himself.*) Unless they're not the same . . .” (39).

¹⁴⁷From Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

¹⁴⁸“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.” -John 10:11-15

millstone.¹⁴⁹ Yet returning to boredom as a concept and sickness of self-ignorance and alienation, we see that this boy has no idea whether he is happy or not (43). Vladimir sympathizes with this sentiment, while Estragon calls himself “Pale for weariness” (44).

Suddenly, Estragon begins to have what could be a conversion. He gives up his boots that for so long bothered him:

“ESTRAGON:

(turning to look at the boots). I'm leaving them there. (Pause.) Another will come, just as . . . as . . . as me, but with smaller feet, and they'll make him happy.

VLADIMIR:

But you can't go barefoot!

ESTRAGON:

Christ did.

VLADIMIR:

Christ! What has Christ got to do with it. You're not going to compare yourself to Christ!

ESTRAGON:

All my life I've compared myself to him” (44).

We see an unselfish, caring spirit appear in Estragon that was not there before. For a moment, he is not self-focused. He is not dwelling on his misery. But the moment passes, and Estragon still wants to hang himself, saying “Pity we haven't got a bit of rope” (45). He even brings up his ignorance to being a liquid modern when he says, “Do you remember the day I threw myself into the Rhone [a river]?” These characters are unaware of their true state, which fits with what we have seen the nature of boredom to be: one of ignorance and misdiagnosis—unrecognized despair that as Kierkegaard would say is all the more despairing for being unaware of itself.¹⁵⁰ This throwing oneself into

¹⁴⁹“But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.” -Matthew 18:6

¹⁵⁰“The specific character of despair is precisely this: it is unaware of being despair.” -Soren Kierkegaard

the river reminds of Heraclitus' river, of which no man steps into twice. It is a double entendre of our character's diving into both a physical body of water and his delving/hoping for a liquid modern existence (mourning that he is unchangeable) when it is that very liquid-modern state (that he does not realize he is in) which leaves him in such boredom. Finally, Estragon gives into the alienation that sets into deeply bored spirits when he says, "I sometimes wonder if we wouldn't have been better off alone, each one for himself...We weren't made for the same road" (45). These men are detached islands in their desperate quest for escape and transcendence from their intolerable and tedious existence.

Now in Act II (the next day, same time, same place) Vladimir sings a sad song about dogs digging another dog a tomb. The song echoes of death's inevitability, which consistently weighs upon the mind of the bored. We see Estragon say "Don't touch me! Don't question me! Don't speak to me! Stay with me!" (48) He wants a lukewarm body for company, but nothing else. This is how so many people live today. Now, Vladimir asks Estragon what he was doing while gone—and Estragon says he was not doing anything. Vladimir responds, "Perhaps you weren't. But it's the way of doing it that counts, the way of doing it, if you want to go on living" (50). Life is what he is talking about. There is a beautiful dance to be had there. To live in life, and not to live apart of life. Vladimir also brings up to Estragon how they almost hung themselves, and Estragon does not recall in the slightest. He says, "either I forget immediately or I never forget" (51): He either internalizes memories and pieces of reality into a distorted, fantastical, heroized, dreamy nostalgia, or [if not abstracted] it is deemed forgettable and irrelevant.

It assumes there is nothing of rich, solid, or tangible substance out there: satisfaction to be found only in the liquid ethereal world.

When Vladimir asks Estragon if he recognizes any of their setting, Estragon exclaims “look at this muckheap! I’ve never stirred from it!” (51) A muckheap is not solid, nor is it fully liquid. It is mush. In a double entendre, Estragon explains how his whole life has occurred within a sloppy, liquid-modern mush. He wishes for death.¹⁵¹ Vladimir responds, “To every man his little cross...Till he dies...And is forgotten” (52) Again, we see our characters bow a weary head to the deaths they will never be able to avoid. His words taste of resentment, as if God crucified humanity by giving him a start-and-end. These half living characters fear the idea of a real, tangible death overtaking them.

Estragon suddenly says “All the dead voices. They make a noise...like sand” (52) Sand recalls a physical portrait of mush and of liquid fluidity: the kind that made the desert fathers pray for freedom from the dulling “demon of noontide.”¹⁵² In speaking of these dead voices: “They all speak at once...each one to itself” (53). These dead voices are all alone and in their head. They are inward, isolated, and abstracting. They exist as monsters or zombies do: “To have lived is not enough for them...to be dead is not enough for them...it is not sufficient” (53). Reality and tangible things which are physical and material, which wear out and decay—these are not good enough anymore for the dead voices, and for the living voices of Estragon and Vladimir. The voices are the expression of the internal rot inside them, which finds the real to be insufficient. Dreams

¹⁵¹“The best thing would be to kill me, like the other...like billions of others”(52).

¹⁵²Reference to *acedia*, which is viewed by many scholars as an etymological ancestor of *boredom*.

of unrealized potential and glittering abstractions can paralyze people from ever really engaging the real. Abstractionists hate the idea of endings and do not know how to accept beginnings, or how to decide on a place from which to anchor and embark on life's adventures. Our characters explains, "It's the start that's difficult...You can start from anything...but you have to decide" (54).

Vladimir says, "What is terrible is to *have* thought" (55). He mourns the absence of thinking, finding his mind barren. One cannot feel pain anymore, and no weeds grow where nerve-endings once sprouted. The world is bald, just like Pozzo's head; it is empty and leprous. Sadly, our characters (fitting, knowing the nature of boredom to be an unrecognized, not-self-aware state of despair) wish they never would have thought in the first place—as if the loss of thought is worse than never having experienced it in the first place. Vladimir explains, "Oh it's not the worst, I know...To have thought...But we could have done without it" (55).

Now, a significant change occurs. The tree from which they once dreamed of hanging themselves has transformed. Vladimir cannot rationally explain or understand it, exclaiming "Yesterday evening it was all black and bare. And now it's covered with leaves...But in a single night!" (56). Yet, Estragon dismisses this miracle and empirical observation as a phantom. In delusion, Estragon has become so abstract and reductive he cannot correctly or empirically experience reality. For him, this is all the world, time, and place has become: a bland compartment where "there's no lack of void" (57). Reducing the experienceable world into nothing, Estragon says "yesterday evening we spent blathering about nothing in particular. That's been going on now for half a century" (57).

Again, we see Kierkegaard justified: it is the boring person that interprets the world as boring. It is the internal being that has become a nothing that sees the world and finds it to be boring. No amount of external distraction can fix this malady, for it is one that starts and ends with the sufferers themselves. The malady is a silent one that you hardly realize or notice until it has snatched away your soul. Vladimir points out Estragon's injury from Lucky's earlier outburst, saying "There's the wound! Beginning to fester!" (58) Estragon responds, "And what about it?" (58) Estragon is leprous and unaware of his pitiful condition. Sound familiar? While Estragon is blind to his sickness, he still feels its symptoms, even if the malady remains hidden. It is a disconnected disease that goes misdiagnosed and misunderstood, causing symptoms to continually flare. Leprous Estragon shouts "I'm in hell!" (65).

Boredom rots away at the self. All of us want to be more than just a shade of grey in a world blind, empty, devoid of color. We want to *be something*. Estragon explains, "We always find something...to give us the impression we exist?" (60). Vladimir responds affirmatively, calling himself and Estragon "magicians" (60). They are creators of fantasy but are lost in their dark hand-wavey arts. We must remember that magicians do not actually do anything. They are masters of illusion, and not genuine creators. They appear to be creators but are nothing of the kind: similar to how many men who appear to be just in the eyes of the masses are in actuality rotten. The good and true men are often the ones crucified.¹⁵³

Vladimir waxes poetic: "has it not long been straying in the night without end of the abyssal depths?" (73) For him, the world unending is just as dreadful as the thought

¹⁵³Christ on the Cross, Socrates in *Apology*, etc.

of one's own inevitable end is. There is an ironic tension here. In abstraction, we dread the tangible world. Thus, we create an unbearable world that is all suspended, unending abyss. We lust for the environments and understandings of reality which leave us feeling jaded. It is crazy, and yet observed time and time again. As Estragon says, "We are all born mad. Some remain so" (73). Here in the West, he is right. This is the natural result of a sickness so misunderstood for so long. However, people can grow to become docile bovine (as Nietzsche would call them) and can lose their extra-dimensional "madness." They can become people who no longer think, but always look for something to pass the time. They can become bored. Vladimir tells his audience straight about their condition:

"We wait. We are bored...No, don't protest, we are bored to death, there's no denying it. Good. A diversion comes along and what do we do? We let it go to waste. Come, let's get to work!...In an instant all will vanish and we'll be alone once more, in the midst of nothingness!" (73).

Returning to the theme of hell, let us examine this exchange:

"*ESTRAGON:*\nWhat's the matter with you?\n*VLADIMIR:*\nGo to hell.\n*ESTRAGON:*\nAre you staying there?\n*VLADIMIR:*\nFor the time being" (74).

A double entendre here implies hell is a choice. Vladimir will stay there, and he will sit on the ground for the time being. Throughout this story, both characters have cried out that they are in hell. Hell is a place for the guilty, whether they remember why they are there or not. Absence of feeling can wipe away one's self-awareness of their own sin. So it is with the vacuous state of being bored.

Suddenly, Pozzo reappears. A nonsensical man, he is sick, deformed, and blunted. He does not answer to Pozzo anymore, but to Abel. The innocent Old Testament brother of murderous Cain, this name hints at Camus' belief of men being innocent at their core. Additionally, the following passage confirms to us that Lucky is meant to represent the masses, and overall humankind:

“*ESTRAGON:*

Abel! Abel!

POZZO:

Help!

ESTRAGON:

Got it in one!

VLADIMIR:

I begin to weary of this motif.

ESTRAGON:

Perhaps the other is called Cain. Cain! Cain!

POZZO:

Help!

ESTRAGON:

He's [Lucky's] all humanity” (76-77).

Pozzo (now ‘Abel’) says “I am blind” (78). His name of innocence combined with his blindness further cements a picture of one who is not naturally innocent, but rather someone who is oblivious, ignorant, and unaware. Camus' man is innocent with eyes wide open. Beckett's man is more like a shadow of Plato's cave: ignorant, bound and blind. One that is not innocent but rather enslaved. We see blinded, pitiful Pozzo avoid time saying, “The blind have no notion of time. The things of time are hidden from them too” (80). Vladimir responds with “Well just fancy that! I could have sworn it was just the opposite” (80). Vladimir is comically hinting at how men like Camus, and those enslaved to boredom, unavoidably, constantly exist within time. They cannot escape it. Subconsciously, it is the very thing that they react to. Pozzo's world has become beyond

dull, with everything reduced to perpetual irrelevance.¹⁵⁴ Like the pathetic liquid modern he is, what Pozzo carries in the giant bag he holds is *sand*, which is essentially mush.

Pozzo is static, insensible, insensitive, stagnant. Pozzo explains how we were born to die, and in such a world where starts and ends are inevitable, it is the middle of such tangible bookends that is irrelevant.¹⁵⁵ He deems life obsolete because it cannot stop the start or end of time. Life is boring because its path is certain. It is ordinary and tangible. Pozzo the abstractionist cannot bear what he views to be a pathetic existence. But maybe Pozzo can return to reality. Perhaps he is not too far gone. Vladimir wonders, “I wonder is he really blind...it seemed to me he saw us” (83-84).

Estragon continues to question Vladimir’s reality. Does he know anything? Is there a point to finding truth if it is undiscoverable? Vladimir soon gives up on the quest for truth.¹⁵⁶ He cannot pursue any *vita contemplativa* if he does not believe there is anything to be found in the first place. Vladimir’s despair grows as he says “Habit is a great deadener. At me too someone is looking, of me too someone is saying, He is sleeping, he knows nothing, let him sleep on...I can’t go on!...What have I said?” (84). The repetition of habit can lead to a distracting leprosy that could be viewed as freedom, and Vladimir knows this. This is why humans schedule and busy ourselves into our

¹⁵⁴We see this when Pozzo says “I don’t remember having met anyone yesterday. But tomorrow I won’t remember having met anyone today. So don’t count on me to enlighten you” (82).

¹⁵⁵When our characters wonder how he ended up so pathetic and dead, Pozzo responds: “Have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! It’s abominable! When! When! One day, is that not enough for you, one day he went dumb, one day I went blind, one day we’ll go deaf, one day we were bom, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second, is that not enough for you? They give birth astride of a grave, the light gleams an instant, then it’s night once more. On!” (83).

¹⁵⁶Vladimir wonders “Was I sleeping, while the others suffered? Am I sleeping now? Tomorrow, when I wake, or think I do, what shall I say of today? That with Estragon my friend, at this place, until the fall of night, I waited for Godot? That Pozzo passed, with his carrier, and that he spoke to us? Probably. But in all that what truth will there be?” (84).

graves. Yet He is aware that he is asleep and ignorant of something. He is aware of his unawareness. Perhaps this gives Vladimir a chance at waking up to his place of unaware despair. Yet, like Pozzo earlier, the episode ends, and he lapses into ignorance.¹⁵⁷

The boy appears again, ignorant of what happened yesterday. When Vladimir asks the boy “What does he do, Mr. Godot?” the boy responds with “He does nothing, Sir” (85) This is important because the boy could be saying that God, or Godot, is fully *being*. He does not do, He is. In his own words, He is the great “I AM.”¹⁵⁸ The boy asserts that, just as the nature of God is grounded in *being* and not *doing*, so do we find fulfillment and identity not in *doing* but *being*. The boy could be saying that God is immutable and unchanging, and that he always does nothing because he always *is something*. But in closing, our characters cannot endure the existence they experience. Either Godot [God] will somehow save them, or they will choose to escape their tedium in suicide.¹⁵⁹

In conclusion, both Estragon and Vladimir embody two reactionary states of being in response to the malady of boredom. One is happy doing nothing. The other

¹⁵⁷“What have I said?” (84)

¹⁵⁸Exodus 3

¹⁵⁹**ESTRAGON:**

I can’t go on like this.

VLADIMIR:

That’s what you think.

ESTRAGON:

If we parted? That might be better for us.

VLADIMIR:

We’ll hang ourselves tomorrow. (/Pause./) Unless Godot comes.

ESTRAGON:

And if he comes?

VLADIMIR:

We’ll be saved” (86).

cannot sit still. Both are expressions of unaware despair, or true boredom. They are bored to death in the midst of nothingness, or, perhaps more aptly put, a world that means nothing to them. Pozzo, who “used to have wonderful sight” (78) seems to be someone who has gone from an aesthetic worldview that lusts for life into a victim. Limitless opportunity to engorge himself on existence has left him blind and feeling victimized. The limitlessness he was not made for leaves him passive and incapable of properly valuing or experiencing the world anymore. It has become nothingness to him. Perhaps what we see in Pozzo is a perfect encapsulated example of how liquid modern men fall. Ultimately though, Beckett does not give us a real answer to our problem of boredom. He gives us an extremely insightful illustration, and yet leaves us like the characters—waiting for Godot and waiting for solutions to our boredom.

CHAPTER FOUR

Responding to 'Incurable' Boredom

Walker Percy says in his work *Lost in the Cosmos* that men are like lonely Robinson Crusoes.¹⁶⁰ Bauman would agree, and Milton Friedman would too.¹⁶¹ We are individualists to an abhorrent fault. But beyond self-awareness of this alienating disconnect, is there any way to respond? Is there a practical way to solve the problem of boredom? The solution I inevitably will propose reincorporates both active will and contemplative grace [the *vitas*] into communion with each other.

Nietzsche's Response

Nietzsche was the son of a devout Christian minister who abandoned his theology studies after finding Christianity to be weak, ingenuine, and inadequate. Nietzsche thought the redeemed ought to look a bit more like it.¹⁶² Disgusted and disturbed with what Christianity stood for,¹⁶³ Nietzsche advocated for constructive self-creation, as he

¹⁶⁰“Man is a lonely and troubled species, who does not know who he is or what to do with himself, feeling himself somehow different from other creatures, both superior and inferior—superior because, after all, he studies other animals and writes scientific articles about them, and other animals don't study him; inferior because he is not a very good animal, is often stupid, irrational, and self-destructive—and solitary in the Cosmos, like Robinson Crusoe marooned on an island populated by goats” (Percy, Chapter 16).

¹⁶¹Friedman speaks of “the economist's favorite abstraction of Robinson Crusoe” to describe households in his work *On Capitalism and Freedom*, and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher bluntly said “there is no such thing as society” (Bauman 30). Friedman [was](#) an advisor to Thatcher while she was PM.

¹⁶²“They would have to sing better songs to make me believe in their Redeemer: his disciples would have to look more redeemed!” (TSZ, 116).

¹⁶³“The roots of Nietzsche's thinking remain in the Protestant Christianity in which he was bred (‘I am the descendant of whole genealogies of Christian clergymen’), in the philosophy of Schopenhauer whom in adolescence he chose for his master, and in the Greek studies in which he was engaged by choice

believed that the use of reason and will to pursue and find truth was forever marred by the systematization of Christianity. In this sense, Nietzsche thought Christianity led to boredom. Nietzsche thinks that dissolution of liquidity and freedom occurs because of the Christian priestly ascetic that systematically won.¹⁶⁴ He points out gaping societal holes of nihilism as wreckage from a formulaic, suffocating Christianity that left no room for meaning beyond Christ.¹⁶⁵ But for the atheist Nietzsche, all of life is inherently a nothingness with or without Christianity.¹⁶⁶ To conceptually view one's life then as tangibly "in despair" is perverse and abstract. Blackham explains:

The disgust for life [i.e. Kierkegaard's *sickness unto death*], the nausea, the turning away, which arises primarily amongst a subjugated people whose aggressiveness is turned inwards, but which has also plenty of other causes and conditions, becomes itself a theme, an interpretation giving a meaning to life and suffering, an organized purpose, a form of will and being. It produces much that is

and by profession. However the tree is riven, blasted, and bent, it feeds from these soils and is anchored there" (Blackham, 24).

¹⁶⁴"The characteristic of the modern age is that the ideals and virtues of the subjugated, the priestly ascetic valuations, have prevailed over all: manifest in Schopenhauer's pessimism, in European nihilism, in the dissolution of great traditions, in socialism and the equalitarian ideals of the French Revolution, in democracy and Rousseau's sentimental idealization of the natural man. Most serious of all, it is manifest in the proudest achievement of the modern age, in science" (Blackham 28).

¹⁶⁵Here David Bentley Hart explains why such men feel they cannot avoid the meaningless life: "But what is the consequence, then, when Christianity, as a living historical force, recedes? We have no need to speculate, as it happens; modernity speaks for itself: with the withdrawal of Christian culture, all the glories of the ancient world that it baptized and redeemed have perished with it in the general cataclysm. Christianity is the midwife of nihilism, not because it is itself nihilistic, but because it is too powerful in its embrace of the world and all of the world's mystery and beauty; and so to reject Christianity now is, of necessity, to reject everything except the barren anonymity of spontaneous subjectivity. As Ivan Karamazov's Grand Inquisitor tells Christ, the freedom that the gospel brings is too terrible to be borne indefinitely. Our sin makes us feeble and craven, and we long to flee from the liberty of the sons of God; but where now can we go? Everything is Christ's" (*Christ and Nothing*).

¹⁶⁶"It is absolutely impossible to disguise *what* in point of fact is made clear by every complete will that has taken its direction from the ascetic ideal; this hate of the human, and even more of the animal, and more still of the material, this horror of the senses, of reason itself, this fear of happiness and beauty, this desire to get right away from all illusion, change, growth, death, wishing and even desiring—all this means—let us have the courage to grasp it—a will for Nothingness, a will opposed to life, a repudiation of the most fundamental conditions of life, but it is and remains *a will!* and to say at the end that which I said at the beginning—man will wish Nothingness rather than not wish *at all*." -Nietzsche, *Third Essay on The Genealogy of Morals* (Aphorism 28).

beautiful and best, but when it becomes the major theme, the dominant and exclusive interpretation, a blight on the positive instincts and primal energies, then life is sick, goodness is called evil and evil good.” (Blackham 30).

Nietzsche would view Kierkegaard’s despair as an abstract malady and pathetic construct of warped humanity. Yet, he still acknowledges it as a legitimate epidemic in the hearts of modern men.

Aware of the Weariness

Nietzsche recognized the despair and subsequent boredom that modern men suffered from, saying that those who find this existence wearisome suffer from a despair they are blind to.¹⁶⁷ Thus, he wanted to make such suffering people self-aware of their malady.

To make himself [Nietzsche] profoundly representative of his time and to surmount its problems in himself in public was his aim in philosophy, an aim which produces not systems or doctrines but a sharpening of awareness, a deepening of understanding, an orientation, a quickening of new possibilities...This playful spitting in the face of the goddess of intellectual idolatry is one way of rudely calling public attention to the insufficiency of public knowledge, which is the constant theme of existentialists” (Blackham 37).

Nietzsche brings awareness to such ignorant, despairing men. To solve this despair, he asserts that humankind must turn to creative methods:

“The general disease of nihilism, the *mal de siècle*¹⁶⁸, the maiming of reason by itself and of will by the Christian ethic, was aggravated in him by the insecure

¹⁶⁷“He who divines the fate that is hidden under the idiotic unwariness and blind confidence of “modern ideas”, and still more under the whole of Christo-European morality—suffers from an anguish with which no other is to be compared” (*BGE, Chapter 5*).

¹⁶⁸In *The Delicate Monster*, the term *mal de siècle* is used as a conceptual precursor to boredom (Dalle Pezze and Salzani 14). Boredom is something that only nihilist societies grapple with. For Nietzsche, rationalism was marred by Christianity. Formulaic Christianity was the problem. However, this does not mean that real Christianity was or is the actual problem.

organic basis on which his life rested: hence the desperate push for the sun and the ecstatic vital equilibrium of the dance¹⁶⁹” (Blackham 24).

On Dancing and Danger

This concept of the dance must be further discussed. Nietzsche explains,

The kind of *experimental philosophy* which I am living, even anticipates the possibility of the most fundamental Nihilism, on principle: but by this I do not mean that it remains standing at a negation, at a no, or at a will to negation. It would rather attain to the very reverse—to a *Dionysian affirmation* of the world, as it is, without subtraction, exception, or choice—it would have eternal circular motion. (*The Will to Power*, 1041)

Nietzsche mocks the formulaic language when he says, “A Dionysian attitude to Life—*my formula for this is amor fati*” (*The Will to Power*, 1041). In the face of nihilism and negation, Nietzsche encourages us to embrace existence. Perhaps god is dead.

Regardless, we Dionysians must dance!¹⁷⁰ Without the dance, there is nothingness. This is akin to what Josef Pieper discusses in his work *Happiness and Contemplation*.¹⁷¹

Nietzsche’s Bacchantic dance should be understood as a potential response to the problem of boredom, though there is danger to its embrace: it welcomes both good and evil into its life-affirming fold. This echoes the argument of Ivan’s devil in *The Brothers*

¹⁶⁹Here we see an example of Nietzsche’s emphasis of the dance in *TSZ*: “Now I am nimble, now I fly, now I see myself under myself, now a god dances within me” (Nietzsche, 69).

¹⁷⁰Nietzsche balanced a naturalistic ethic that gave him a life-affirming appreciation of the physical world while he simultaneously embraced perspectivism. Nietzsche’s naturalist ethic was most likely rooted in his voracious reading of American Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson as a teenager. In turn, Nietzsche’s love for the natural world certainly inspired Camus in his embrace of life’s simple, physical pleasures.

¹⁷¹“What does indeed make us happy is the infinite and uncreated richness of God; but participation in this, happiness itself, is entirely a “creatural” reality governed from within by our humanity; it is not something that descends overwhelmingly upon us from outside. That is, it is not only something that happens to us; we ourselves are intensely active participants in our own happiness... the activity in which we receive the drink which is happiness is by its nature an activity whose effects work inward. This cannot be otherwise, for only in such activity does the acting person actualize himself” (Pieper 52, 57).

Karamazov which justifies evil in its role as salve to one's meaningless and bored existence. It embraces life, but just like our problem of boredom and rationalism, the solution is colorless, universal, and blind. For better and for worse, it lets anyone and everything in. Nietzsche says yes to existence in a grand show of will, and yet there is severe danger lurking in such glorious acceptance.¹⁷²

The only Way is Will

But such an acceptance and embrace of life's dance requires will. For Nietzsche, it is one's individual will that brings value and meaning more than any objective value standard can. Nietzsche has a problem with such values,¹⁷³ seeing them as bad fruits birthed from traditions that in reality are devoid of substance. Without possibility for objective 'truth,' all traditions are tools to give different groups power. Thus, the strength of one's own will is all that Nietzsche holds on to.

¹⁷²“Nietzsche, having examined the origin of those values, and wanting to say Yes to life, is able to begin to rejoice in evil, as designated by the ascetic ideal, to look beyond good and evil. Consciousness, in any case, is not the last word, the final authority; its generalized and vulgarized world is not superior to the unconscious world within oneself and in nature, in matter. Respect for and trust in the dynamics of the unconscious world, reduction of the value of the conscious and knowable: these are the dangerous but necessary thoughts which threaten the throne and challenge the rule of classical philosophy. Moreover, Nietzsche's rejection of Christian belief and criticism of Christian moral values is not at all made from the standpoint of a scientific materialist, who merely assumes 'belief in a world which is supposed to have its equivalent and measure in human thinking and human valuations, a "world of truth" at which we might be able ultimately to arrive with the help of our insignificant, four-cornered human reason!' Valuation and interpretation are questions far too open to be foreclosed by scientific results. Nor can there be any complacent assumptions; the answers are rooted in will, and what is one man's highest hope may well be to another a distasteful possibility (as Herbert Spencer's vision of progress was to Nietzsche).” (Blackham 31).

¹⁷³“Nietzsche discerns the problem of values as presented for the first time, and therefore as a crisis in the destiny of man, the most important in all history. Hitherto, values have been historically determined; now man has become reflective and must take upon himself the full burden of responsibility and freedom” (Blackham 31).

Nietzschean and Kierkegaardian Will

In worship of formulas and certainty, a certain kind of rationalism made man willing to be a slave—a sheep that a wolf in shepherd's clothing, or a Grand Inquisitor, can manipulate. It is the animal man that is produced.¹⁷⁴ Both Friedrich Nietzsche and Søren Kierkegaard reject this rationalist tradition¹⁷⁵ and pursue meaning with strenuous, focused will. Nietzsche wanted to condemn science, Christianity and rationalism because he believed there was nothing but slavery waiting in such solid standards. Humanity should thus with brave will dive deeper into creative liquidity and the open liquid sea.¹⁷⁶ Kierkegaard also rejects rationalism, but he does so because he believes there is too much substance and existence to fit into such a rationalist, Hegelian framework.¹⁷⁷ Nietzsche finds rationalism too empty, and Kierkegaard finds it too narrow. Thus, they both seek to move beyond it: Nietzsche by moving into creative liquidity, and Kierkegaard by taking a

¹⁷⁴“Thou must obey someone, and for a long time; *otherwise* thou wilt come to grief, and lose all respect for thyself” —this seems to me to be the moral imperative of nature...to nations, races, ages, and ranks, above all, however, to the animal “man” generally, to *mankind*.” (*Beyond Good and Evil, Aphorism 188*).

¹⁷⁵“Nietzsche and Kierkegaard are as divided as the poles and as close as twins. Nietzsche cast his supreme choice upon the finite world which Kierkegaard rejected and resigned. Kierkegaard wrote in flesh and blood his epigram, Nietzsche his rhapsody. For both, their drama moved to its inevitable catastrophe: Kierkegaard precipitated himself into the irrevocable either-or of his final unforgivable attack on the Church, Nietzsche into his Dionysian nihilism, his euphoria and eventual madness. Both are impossible, mutilated, pitiable; both are formidable and command respect” (Blackham 23).

¹⁷⁶“His [Nietzsche's] purpose as a philosopher is to counter the bias, the establishments, the illusions of the age, to raise the questions and set the problems. Morality becomes a problem because neither the machiavellian or pagan good conscience nor the Christian bad conscience is any longer possible: the Christian faith has been undermined and has collapsed, and with it the entire European morality. The first thing to be done is to recognize what this means, to draw the uttermost deductions: ‘every hazard is again permitted to the discerner; the [liquid] sea, *our* sea, again lies open before us; perhaps never before did such an “open sea” exist’” (Blackham 30).

¹⁷⁷“Kierkegaard had not believed that it was possible to discern directly a divine order either in nature or in history, but what he most objected to in Hegel was the attempt to rationalize the Christian religion, to assign it to its place in a grandiose rationale of history” (Blackham 30).

leap of faith into the ultimate solid thing: an unchangeable, and yet beloved, unknown God.¹⁷⁸ Nietzsche saw small, pathetic constructs of solidity in our liquid world and found them not houses built on rock but floating islands of sinking sand.¹⁷⁹ Kierkegaard saw men turned into sand too. He explained how abstraction and detachment from reality was turning what could be fruitful existence into sandy, barren desert.¹⁸⁰ While Nietzsche and Kierkegaard both reject rationalist abstraction for different reasons, their solutions both require a strong will and a brave journey.

On the Beloved Unknown

Similar to Kierkegaard, the philosopher Plato believed we chase a specific “more”: a beloved unknown¹⁸¹ with strenuous will. It is this chase which brings life purpose and satisfaction for Plato. Though “intimations of infinity can be tantalizing—and shocking...these religious pioneers not only knew that there was a beyond, but that that place was knowable. The unknown knowable is the beloved” (Geier 11). This enchanting unknown was and is the pursuit of the scholar, and of the cutting-edge

¹⁷⁸Now, in a sense for Kierkegaard, God can appear liquid. After all, he transcends the ethical when he says to sacrifice Isaac. The God of the Bible goes beyond good and evil here. And what’s needed is to take the large leap of faith into that God’s arms. While God is not unknown to Kierkegaard, but He does not always make sense or seem to fit the commonly-held conception.

¹⁷⁹“Science and democracy are not the modern awakening from the illusions of Christian faith and order, they are the same ascetic valuations in their most viable modern form; they lead to gregarious inertia, mass similarity, equality, and nonentity (mankind turned into sand, ‘small, soft, round, infinite sand’), the extinction of all interest, splendour, and quality in human life; finally, ennui and extinction of the will to live. This is a notion in the moral world comparable to the notion in the physical world of thermo-dynamic equilibrium, the running down of the universe to an irreversible heat-death” (Blackham 34).

¹⁸⁰“Kierkegaard had the same vision of the tendency of the age, which reached its limit in an ‘unlimited panorama of abstract infinity, unrelieved by even the smallest eminence, undisturbed by even the slightest interest, a sea of desert’. Concerned only with the individual and his choice of eternity and believing that such conditions would help to drive the individual back on himself and thus renew the true differential, the only source of vitality, he was not disturbed” (Blackham 34).

¹⁸¹*On the Beloved Unknown and the Learning Soul* (Alfred Geier)

entrepreneur. It is the chase of the learning soul¹⁸² and is connected to our desire for mystery, mystique, and chaos. Will, just as it is required for Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, is needed to attain this beloved something.

The Brave Journey/ Super-Christianity

Willing is not easy. Nietzsche's Superman must bravely overcome false societal constructs just as Kierkegaard's Abraham must bravely overcome the binding, suffocating societal "ethical" in order to obey the will of God. Blackham explains,

The antagonism of Dionysus and Apollo can be resolved, and was resolved by the Greeks in their greatest triumphs, but the antagonism of the Dionysian ideal and the Christian admits of no compromise; it is an Either-Or, the Yes or No to life. In our time it is not enough to drop Christianity and go on as before, for everything that remains is Christian; it is necessary 'to *overcome* everything Christian by something super-Christian, and not only to rid oneself of it—for Christian doctrine is the counter-doctrine of the Dionysian'. *This super-Christian doctrine is the doctrine of Superman*: man is to be surpassed. This is the supreme choice, the commanding aim (Blackham 35).

The language here of becoming 'super-Christian' is striking. If Christian means "little-Christ," then becoming super-Christian would make one similar to Christ. Is this not why Kierkegaard critiqued the Danes, calling the New Testament Church extinct in Denmark?¹⁸³ Kierkegaard saw no 'super-Christians': no one truly resembled the Christ who with kindness and intensity rocked the world at its core. If Nietzsche were to encounter Christ in the flesh, would Nietzsche believe Him to be the Superman? Perhaps Nietzsche's Superman-to-come is pathetic imitation of what Christ was, but without the Holy Spirit of God in Him: rejecting the church of his childhood only to paint a picture of

¹⁸²“The chief goal of the entire book is to understand and show the intimate relation between the soul in a true learning condition and the Beloved Unknown as its *primary* object” (Geier 13).

¹⁸³When Nietzsche says “God is dead and we have killed him” he calls out the present-day Church. Kierkegaard rails against the Danish religious superstructure for the same reason, saying

what he believed the true Christ should be. He does not realize that what he advocates that the Superman do is exactly what both Christ and Abraham did during their lives.

Supermen

Christ, Kierkegaard's Abraham, and Nietzsche's Superman are bold, courageous, and reviled by the crowd. They are countercultural, immortal, divine. Just as Abraham transcended the ethical in obeying the Lord's command, so did Christ transcend the old laws by healing and working on the Sabbath.¹⁸⁴ And yet, there remains an eyelash difference between them. Nietzsche's man rejects the rationalist, modern project of enlightenment morality, just as he rejects Christianity. He is an eyeblink away from Orthodox Christianity in that in Christianity, people approach the good via grace, and not merely with will.

Kierkegaard on Community and Solidity

Though Kierkegaard's Christian man is not like the Superman [aka the Übermensch], his journey is just as strenuous and arduous, requiring the same unshakeable will. For Nietzsche, the solution to nihilist despair and boredom lies solely in the iron will. But "for him [Kierkegaard] the solution lies in faith. If each of us turns to God in faith and becomes the self God wills us to be, perhaps as authentic selves we can find genuine forms of community¹⁸⁵ as well" (Evans, 515-516). Nietzsche would reject

¹⁸⁴Which was illegal according to Old Testament Law.

¹⁸⁵This is how the bureaucracy of safetyism differs from genuine communities of intensity: "Efforts to protect students by creating bureaucratic means of resolving problems and conflicts can have the unintended consequence of fostering moral dependence, which may reduce students' ability to resolve conflicts independently [and to have real community with another in that] both during and after college" (Lukainoff and Haidt, 212).

such concepts of faith and of grace paired with strong will. In the name of approaching the good, Nietzsche would say that the strongest men freely will their own good in their fluid, freely autonomous state that is perpetually being reconstructed.

The Last Men

Nietzsche rejects all softness of will through his account of the last men. Here is a paraphrase of what Zarathustra says to the crowd about the future: "Man is still a whole person, but one day he may become ailing in spirit and barren like a desert, so that no living things may grow in him."¹⁸⁶ For now, there is still bad and good and you. You are not perfect, but you are not sterile and blank. You are a world of intensity for better and for worse. You are not lukewarm. The worst, most pathetic men will be those who are sterile and blank."¹⁸⁷ The last men question everything, and in desperation for knowledge and truth reduce the world from a place of marvelous mystery into a machine governed by predictable formulae. They are the Pontius Pilates who sacrifice Christ on the Cross, wash their hands of it, and ask, "what is truth?"¹⁸⁸ Such a man lives another day, for now safe from the Romans. As Nietzsche quips, "The Last Man lives longest" (46).

¹⁸⁶"And thus spoke Zarathustra to the people:
It is time for man to fix his goal. It is time for man to plant the seed of his highest hope.
His soil is still rich enough for it. But that soil will one day be poor and exhausted, and no lofty tree will
any longer be able to grow there. Alas! there comes the time when man will no longer launch the arrow of
his longing beyond man -- and the string of his bow will have unlearned to whiz!" (TSZ 46).

¹⁸⁷"I tell you: one must still have chaos in oneself, to give birth to a dancing star. I tell you: you
have still chaos in yourselves. Alas! There comes the time when man will no longer give birth to any star.
Alas! There comes the time of the most despicable man [the last man], who can no longer despise himself"
(TSZ 46)

¹⁸⁸"What is love? What is creation? What is longing? What is a star?" -- so asks the Last Man, and
blinks" (TSZ 46).

The last man is reductionist and bored, his world is pathetic because he has made everything banal and boring. He is pitiful in that he is blind to the color of reality. He is a Kipling who is really from no place; one of G.K. Chesterton's heretics.¹⁸⁹ Yet, these last men are proud of the culture they have created.¹⁹⁰ It is a culture that advocates for safetyism because life is found to be burdening and frightening,¹⁹¹ as Estragon says "Don't touch me! Don't question me! Don't speak to me!...Stay with me!"¹⁹² Self-isolating and wary, these last men cannot be led. They send "shepherds" to the madhouse. They cancel them, and yet these sheep are all fungible now, ripe for autocratic harvest. Yet they would not have it any other way. Any difference in thought [that could cause a trigger, or a disruption] is mechanically sent to the madhouse.¹⁹³ They are arrogant and reductive of the world; it is full of systemic problems that require formulaic implementation.¹⁹⁴ This reductive behavior of "making everything small"¹⁹⁵ echoes St.

¹⁸⁹“The earth has become small, and on it hops the Last Man, who makes everything small. His species is ineradicable as the flea; the Last Man lives longest” (TSZ 46).

¹⁹⁰“They have something of which they are proud. What is it called that makes them proud? They call it culture, it distinguishes them from the goatherds” (TSZ 45). These are the bread and circuses that pathetic, fungible, and last men celebrate.

¹⁹¹“Turning ill and being distrustful, they consider sinful: they walk warily. He is a fool who still stumbles over stones or men! A little poison now and then: that makes for pleasant dreams. And much poison at the end for a pleasant death. One still works, for work is a pastime. But one is careful lest the pastime should hurt one. One no longer becomes poor or rich; both are too burdensome. Who still wants to rule? Who still wants to obey? Both are too burdensome” (TSZ 46). This sounds exactly like Kierkegaard's bothered man of the *Diapsalmata* as well as Gen Z mired in fear and anxiety.

¹⁹²“They have left the regions where it is hard to live; for they need warmth. One still loves one's neighbor and rubs against him; for one needs warmth” (TSZ 46).

¹⁹³“No herdsman and one herd! Everyone wants the same thing, everyone is the same: whoever thinks otherwise goes voluntarily into the madhouse” (TSZ 46).

¹⁹⁴“Formerly all the world was insane,” -- say the subtlest of them, and they blink. They are clever and know all that has happened: so there is no end to their derision” (TSZ 47).

¹⁹⁵“Behold! I shall show you the *Last Man*...the earth has become small, and upon it hops the Last Man, who makes everything small” (TSZ 46).

Augustine and C. S. Lewis' view of what evil and corruption do—shrink and dissolve things. If the world seems so small to these last men, perhaps it is because they only see the imperfections in it—making it appear more deformed and smaller than it really is. They are bored, and it is because all they do to survive is live in a pathetic, lukewarm, pitiful way.¹⁹⁶ These last men, just like the melancholic, bored Nero, are all true nihilists: people who live antithetically and in blatant opposition to the life of abundance and intensity that Christ has called humans to. Nietzsche finds them “The most contemptible” (45).

We are These Men

Nietzsche's description of the last men sounds disturbingly similar to our Western society's youngest generations. It also fits with Raposa's assertion that bored men are those with dull imaginations. Now, there could be two ways to arrive here. One could be apathetically bred to be a last man, which could come about with the teaching of men to live Sisyphean, solely *vita activa* focused lives. However, Nietzsche in a sense with his alternative shows the fallibility of his own theory for happiness and transcendence. By explaining how the power structures of the strong can be corrupted, Nietzsche gives an admitting nod to the fact that even his great men who have nobly reconstructed themselves and their society could still end up corrupting and marring their own handiwork: ruining the artwork and masterpiece that they creatively set into motion. And yet, Nietzsche calls this picture a far-off response to nihilism—a generational malady so

¹⁹⁶“People still quarrel, but are soon reconciled -- otherwise it upsets their stomachs. They have their little pleasures for the day, and their little pleasures for the night, but they have a regard for health. “We have discovered happiness,” -- say the Last Men, and they [mechanically] blink” (TSZ 47).

distant it is nearly impossible to comprehend. Yet it is empirically seen and observed today, all around us. Look at the statistics of how many young people daily drown in fear and anxiety, and how so many cannot move out of their parents' homes due to indecision and insecurity. The last men are here and are too apathetic and distracted and frightened to realize the pathetic, dangerous state of what they truly are. We are the last men—the comfortable and wealthy but bored, anxious, and apathetic bourgeois of the modern world: the wealthiest country ever recorded in human history. Nietzsche would agree: we are in the times of the last men, where a thousand golf balls are lost, and it all ends “not with a bang, but a whimper.”¹⁹⁷

Will Over Denial

Thus, while Camus nihilistically gave up on finding meaning, Nietzsche countered in his own constructive way. There is a significant difference between Camus' abundant self-salvation and Nietzsche's genuine, life-affirming dancer, who joyfully teeters on the edges of the world. Thus, Nietzsche finds both traditional Christianity (and would find Camus' defeated, absurdist approach) pitiful. One, when handled rationally, leads to grand-inquisitor-esque bureaucracy. The other rationalizes a meaningless life. Like Plato and Kierkegaard, Nietzsche demands man to will and search for a life-affirming more.

Nietzsche's Break

Nietzsche would agree with Plato and Kierkegaard. They believe that objectivity and reality must include a powerful will in pursuit of the contemplative. Even if

¹⁹⁷From *The Hollow Men* poem, by T.S. Eliot

Nietzsche, as well as the ancients, personally do not believe in the Christian God, they believe in the contemplative and the pursuit into chaos to chase that contemplative. Yet this chase of Plato and Kierkegaard not only allows for grace but pursues a substantive, objective something.¹⁹⁸ From this pursued something grace is received. Such a chase is an objective pursuit, and this is where Nietzsche breaks with Plato and Kierkegaard. All advocate for willing the bold and brave chase. However, Plato and his dialectic as well as Kierkegaard in his inwardness doctrine actually pursue something objectively sacred. Rather than pursuing the unknown, Nietzsche advocates for the creation of synthetic constructs out of ourselves. He does his best to escape the nihilism,¹⁹⁹ but he does it through will-to-power and that will alone. This is where Nietzsche breaks from the Christians and the ancients: all three (save Nietzsche) agree that pursuit of an unknown but objective something is key to escaping boredom and despair. However, Nietzsche does not will or pursue anything specific.

Solidity Matters / House of Sand

A grounded perspective rooted in stability matters. Nietzsche challenged men to have an individualist dignity culture rooted in oneself. Kierkegaard's Christ summons us to be grounded in Him. Though they differ, both preach gospels of "groundedness." But can one be grounded on sinking sand, or liquid flux? While Nietzsche suggests that we

¹⁹⁸"Love is the sureness about the existence of "something" without yet knowing at all what that "something" is... These are two but the two are inseparable, for the Beloved is *primarily* the Unknown, and the Unknown is *primarily* the Beloved" (Geier 16-17).

¹⁹⁹When I refer to Nietzsche, I do not refer to a nihilist, though him being nihilist is a view held by many. Rather, I refer to the brave view (which for clarification purposes I will call Nietzschean) that says we can find groundedness in our existence incarnate, and that there is meaning at the very least to be created out of ourselves in this paradoxical, often-unintelligible world.

built existence upon ourselves, he does not account for how humanity blows like chaff. His belief that men at their best can leap solitary and free into the heights is irrational, especially in light of this discussion of how men are bred by society to be weak. Yet Nietzsche's answer is to go deeper into liquid modernity, throwing off solid form forever.²⁰⁰ Nietzsche's man is a completely unbound, constantly transforming liquid who can never actually be anything. Like Camus, his man is inherently nothing.

Ghosts Cannot Act

Nietzsche's strategy is similar to the Christians and ancients, but his end purpose or goal is structurally inadequate and incomplete. He showed us how to race, run, and will, but he never showed us how to be anything. Nietzsche's undeterrable concept of will is certainly key to escaping melancholy and boredom.²⁰¹ But if a person has no body or heart, if they are a ghost and are detached—well, where can the strength of will come from if not from a body? How will it survive? How will it will? How can a bored, detached ghost put on flesh? How can an in-flux spirit become a solid man? This question regarding Christ's hypostatic union has perplexed scholars for centuries, and this is liquid modernity's issue. Men have become ghosts, cattle, or something that cannot “will,” like substantive, solid, flesh-and-blood men can. Thus, if men are already bored and bovine, Nietzsche does not show them a way out of their boredom. His message is for men who are in immediate danger of slipping into that unaware despair, making it

²⁰⁰“The ascetic ideal forced to its last refuge in the will to truth is compelled to accept the need for interpretations and valuations which it had renounced, and this means alternatives to established moralities: ‘Nothing is true, everything is allowed’, that esoteric principle of the elect. Or else it must choose suicidal nihilism. But such an open-eyed choice is the most difficult of all” (Blackham 29).

²⁰¹Here we see Kierkegaard show the connection to willing deeply: “melancholy is sin, really it is a sin as great as any, for it is the sin of not willing deeply and sincerely, and this is a mother to all sins” (*Either/Or* 492).

preventative at best. Unless a man is woken up from his unawareness he will not understand this as a cure to his unrecognized malady.

Teleology Reappears

Teleology, or the idea that humanity was made for the pursuit of a particular end and aim beyond oneself provides meaning and color to existence, even if the reason and details behind life remain unclear. If a man is aware of his despair, he can address the wound and weather the storm. We will never be able to learn and solve our despair if we have become unaware of learning itself, or at least potential for objective truths beyond ourselves.²⁰² When we fall out of touch and become unaware of the something²⁰³ we search for: well, that is the moment we become confused, ignorant, bovine and deeply bored. This explains how the epistemological arrogance of rationalism and boredom's characteristic unawareness fit together. One cannot learn or love if they are unaware of their lack of it. Without such love, they are nothing.²⁰⁴ Thus, true pursuit of a Beloved Unknown (the ancient and the Christian's response to unaware, tedious existence) advocates a life-affirming dive into the unknown in pursuit of something,²⁰⁵ rather than a

²⁰²“Just as it was necessary to remember and *never forget* “whatever,” it is absolutely necessary for the erotic soul to maintain being *constantly* “in touch” with the Beloved Unknown; otherwise the Beloved Unknown will be forgotten, Love will be gone, and the soul may no longer be aware that it does not know what it does not know. On the other hand, if it *remains* “in touch” with the Beloved Unknown, learning becomes possible or even likely” (Geier 18).

²⁰³“If the learning soul is or becomes *unaware* of its lack and of not having “whatever,” the Eros that makes learning possible would also not remain but would depart” (Geier 30).

²⁰⁴1 Corinthians 13

²⁰⁵Ultimately, “The supposed “object” of Eros cannot be specified because it is not known. It is, however, not simply not known, but it is *not yet* known. And it is *always* not yet known. Such is the character, the unchanging character, of the Beloved Unknown. Therefore, the learning or erotic soul, by being and *remaining* “in touch” with the Beloved Unknown and realizing what it is lacking, and realizing it does not *yet* have the *knowledge* of that which it lacks, becomes ready and willing to learn” (Geier 31).

Nietzschean dive into the unknown for an *ex-nihilo* construction of something from *nothing*. If there is no conception of teleology that tells a human what they are meant and able to be, then they will assume as Camus and Nietzsche did that they are at their core a liquid-modern nothing.

Practical Christianity and Nietzsche

Nietzsche is fundamentally wrong from an Orthodox perspective. He playfully performs the dance of the will, but his individual does not pursue nor believe in any objective sort of redemption. He has no willingness to experience grace. However, Nietzsche's emphasis on the will and on doing could be understood in light of the Catholic hope for sanctification: restorative liturgies done to experience the divine and for Him to heal our maladies. Nietzsche's will-to-power is what Mother Teresa and Dorothy Day practiced daily. They lived in secret—in a 'long loneliness'²⁰⁶—and did what they were supposed to in quiet integrity. In a sense, these two saints danced.²⁰⁷ With Nietzschean will, they understood (as Aquinas did with his view of a Christian teleology) that Grace does not destroy nature but completes and fulfills and transforms it.²⁰⁸ The Dionysian, Nietzschean will maintains the *vita activa*, but only grace can restore and renew the *vita contemplativa*. Mother Teresa was the most powerful figure of the 20th

²⁰⁶As Christ, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard all in their own way advocate for.

²⁰⁷[This article](#) reveals the connection well: "Nietzsche's ubiquitous references to dance are ever-present reminders that the work of overcoming oneself – of freeing oneself enough from anger, bitterness and despair to say 'Yes!' to life – is not just an intellectual or scientific task. An ability to affirm life demands bodily practices that discipline our minds to elemental rhythms, to the creativity of our senses, and to the 'great reason', our body, 'that does not say "I" but does 'I'.' Only when we engage in such practices will we have the sensory awareness we need in order to discern whether the values we create and the movements we make express love for ourselves and the Earth."

²⁰⁸See footnote 23

century, and yet she was thoroughly ordinary. She was not worldly, or bombastic, or aesthetic. Yet, she quietly rocked the worlds she tangibly touched and restored day by day, step by step, brick by brick. She stopped reaching for abstract transcendence in the face of gravity.²⁰⁹ Christian abstraction can lead to terrible things (i.e. the Grand Inquisitor's quest for domination, control, authority) when really this practical and liturgical life of action²¹⁰ is simple but hard.

Nietzsche: Not just a Nihilist, but still a Nihilist

Nietzsche should be viewed as an optimistic idealist²¹¹ reactionarily responding to nihilist sentiments he cannot help but feel. Nietzsche points out the same problems earlier mentioned in Kant's rationalist methods: the world becomes more false and unknowable the more we make it objective, rationalist, and explainable.²¹² Yet Nietzsche consistently and thoroughly rails against the idea of God and reality being within our understanding, which would still fundamentally make him an epistemological nihilist at his core, with his philosophy acting as a life-affirming counterargument to his empirical observations of existence as nothingness.

²⁰⁹Raposa comments on the dance's constraints: "the possibility of what a dance can "mean" are constrained not only by the dancer's practiced habits of movement, but by the sometimes not so gentle force of gravity itself" (Raposa 131).

²¹⁰As Christ said, "Peter, do you love me?...Feed my sheep." (John 21:15-17)

²¹¹"Idealism is the metaphysical view that associates reality to ideas in the mind rather than to material objects. It lays emphasis on the mental or spiritual components of experience, and renounces the notion of material existence." -[CUNY](#) definition.

²¹²"The world became false precisely owing to the qualities which *constitute its reality*, namely, change, evolution, multifariousness, contrast, contradiction, war'; these were rejected as appearance. Logical ideals (the unity of a systematic whole, consistency, uniformity, etc.) treated as true instead of recognized as useful mean precisely a refusal to accept truth, the real world. The attempt to cancel or transcend the point of view (human or individual) is not to pass from appearance to reality but to postulate a world without relations, unknowable and non-existent" (Blackham 25).

Conclusion on Nietzsche, Plato and Kierkegaard

The journeys to becoming *something* for both Nietzsche, Plato, and Kierkegaard are the same approach. All require will, and all require faith: for the former, in oneself—for the latter two, in God. They differ in that Nietzsche's journey will never taste Grace. Nietzsche ended up trying to survive in his liquid modern sea, and Nietzsche ended up drowning.²¹³ He offers a legitimate but porous response: he cannot exclude the embrace of heinous deeds and criminal existence from his solution to the problem of boredom, and he never sets a goal or aim for his followers to become any particular something. Rather, his philosophy demands one leave behind everything, willing with no direction and for no clear reason other than to abandon mass mediocrity.

A Recapitulation

The rationalist does not bother whether there really is meaning to chase or not.²¹⁴ His technical knowledge empties existence, making life not a rich tapestry to explore, but

²¹³“If one is determined to will and to live the possibility of nihilism, then one no longer has any independent standpoint under one's feet; worse than Kierkegaard ‘out upon the seventy thousand fathoms of water’, one is actually sucked down and engulfed: what from the independent standpoint of responsible freedom was recognized as the unavoidable ambiguity of good and of evil in the world becomes, first, the ambiguity of one's own will, and then its abandonment to the eternal destruction and the eternal return and the Dionysian ecstasy. No more than scepticism can be overcome by doubting it can nihilism be overcome by willing it. Nietzsche began the building of his intellectual home with the invention, taste, and boldness of a master, but he became involved in neologism and travesty, and at last it stood unachieved, like a ruin, open to the four winds and to the sun and the rain. Only the most foolish of his followers have attempted to occupy it. More vividly than any, he exemplifies the existentialist truth that a philosopher who tries to make himself representative and seriously builds himself a habitation to suit his own intimately understood needs does not offer a home to others but may enormously enrich the resources out of which others build for their own convenience and dignity” (Blackham 41-42).

²¹⁴“He [the rationalist] sincerely believes that a training in technical knowledge is the only education worthwhile, because he is moved by the faith that there is no knowledge, in the proper sense, except technical knowledge” (Oakeshott 38).

a jaded scrabble for survival.²¹⁵ Ironically, rationalists reject fluidity of any kind for formulaic rigidity. They would reject the doctrines of liquid modernity, and yet it is unaware rationalism that leads us to liquid modernity. The suffocating structure of rationalism made us reactionarily view free, unbridled expression as our only hope and saving grace from being iron-clad. We reactionarily hate the technical, rational objectivity, and like the amorous, dramatic, romantic, translucent liquid-modern flux...or at least, we have romanticized it. Yet, it is supremely rationalist to think we should formulaically trust our feelings and thoughts. Belief in our own infallibility reveals our arrogant God complexes. And yet, you may go outside and realize that the sky is not really falling and that there is no need to cower in fear.²¹⁶ You may touch something solid and realize that it is not as dreadful as you might think it is. But you must take the leap of faith into the unknown to find out. And as an anti-fragile being incarnate, if you fall you must stand up and rise again with head held high.

Conclusion

Nietzsche points us towards the truth of the matter, though a true resolution cannot be found in his godless, nihilist view. It is life-affirming, but it is little more than that. He helps the slothful Christian unaware of their despair begin to boldly reinvigorate a desire and will to live again, though he does not provide the framework of grace that can truly save a man from his despair. Nietzsche will has no direction other than going

²¹⁵We can conclude with Oakeshott that “Unavoidably, the conduct of life, for him [the Rationalist] is a jerky, discontinuous affair, the solution of a stream of problems” (Oakeshott 41).

²¹⁶A quote from Dr. Robert Leahy (Director, The American Institute for Cognitive Therapy): “Thoughts are not always true. I might be thinking it’s raining outside, but then I go outside and it’s not raining. We have to find out what the facts are, don’t we? Sometimes we look at things like we are looking through a dark lens and everything seems dark. Let’s try putting on different glasses” (Lukainoff and Haidt, 242).

deeper into abstract fantasy, which is no real solution at all. In a sense, it does in liquid-modern abstractionism what Camus chose to do in materialism: in insatiable pursuit eat as much of it as you can. Eat and drink now, for tomorrow you die. His redeeming trait though is the understanding how will should not be forgotten, as it is the interplay between will and grace that mankind long ago lost.

Boredom could be positively framed as a beautiful indication. It is a symptom of hidden despair that must be dealt with if life is to have meaning and color. One must not brush it off or let it go. Bauman says, “As Martin Heidegger reminded us, all of us, human beings, live towards death – and we cannot chase that knowledge away from our minds however hard we try” (Foreword, *Liquid Modernity*). But we must push back. At the very least we must pursue the beloved unknown, and at the very best pray for the discovery of ourselves in Christ and for the future fulfillment of our *telos*. Choosing the beloved unknown over an existence of nihilism is our method of escape from boredom’s colorless clutches. We must transcend the suffocating rationalist ethic and choose to dance an existence of both contemplative grace and active will.

The way to escape boredom is by once again re-linking together these sentiments of the active will [*vita activa*] and contemplative grace [*vita contemplativa*]. Camus denies both active will and contemplative Grace. Nietzsche in life-affirming will embraces the active but epistemologically denies the contemplative idea of grace. It is only Kierkegaard and teleology which offers a solution that carries both will and grace. It is not Sisyphus but Abraham who trudges up Mount Moriah while carrying his only son to die. This is the unimaginable, intense interplay inherent in true existence, and in a true man who God calls blessed. It is this man whose name will never be forgotten.

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