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The Look as a Call to Freedom
On the Possibility of Sartrean Grace

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Abstract: While the traditional understanding of the look views it in terms of shame and oppression, I read Sartre's *Notebooks for an Ethics* with Beauvoir's *Ethics of Ambiguity* to argue that the look always gives me the world and inaugurates my freedom. Even the oppressor's look reveals that I am free and that my existence is conditioned by the existence of other free beings. Because the look gives me the world as the arena within which I act freely, it is a means of grace, and receiving it only in shame is bad faith. Although my existence remains unjustifiable and this grace cannot promise salvation, the look calls me out of shame to the pursuit of my and others' freedom, and this call is a gift.

Keywords: bad faith, Beauvoir, freedom, gift, grace, Sartre, shame

That the traditional understanding of the look views it mainly in terms of shame, oppression, and conflict is unsurprising, since that is precisely how *Being and Nothingness* presents it.[1] It is well known, however, that *Being and Nothingness* describes how one relates to others while in bad faith, which is the attempt to deny freedom, and that it is far from being Sartre's last word on human relations. In *Being and Nothingness* itself, Sartre writes, in a footnote to his discussion of sadism and masochism, that "these considerations do not rule out the possibility of a morality of deliverance and salvation,"[2] and the book concludes with the promise of an investigation of freedom that would take place "within the domain of morality."[3] If the relation to the other may be one of cooperation or togetherness rather than conflict, then it is reasonable to suspect that the look, in which the self discovers that it does exist in relation to the other, need not be only an occasion for shame. Nevertheless, most readers of Sartre continue

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to understand the look in terms of shame. I propose, therefore, to undertake a reexamination of the look, via a reading of Sartre's *Notebooks for an Ethics* and Simone de Beauvoir's *Ethics of Ambiguity*, that will ultimately understand it as a call to the pursuit of freedom, both one's own and that of others. Indeed, it is the look, I will argue, that gives the for-itself the world and inaugurates its freedom, and thus the experience of the look may reasonably be considered as an experience of grace—though the for-itself may choose to reject this grace and to receive the look only in shame and hatred.

Several recent reinterpretations of the look challenge the traditional view by arguing that shame is not necessarily bad and need not imply a fundamental conflict between self and other. Lisa Guenther draws on Sartre, Beauvoir, and Levinas to argue that "shame can also pull me out of myself, disrupting the complacency and self-satisfaction of the same, orienting me in ethical and political solidarity with others";[4] Luna Dolezal maintains that "Sartre demonstrates that embodied social relations are constitutive of reflective self-consciousness and form part of the very fabric of our being";[5] Ruth Kitchen, reading Sartre and Beauvoir, contends that "through an encounter(s) with shame, the subject can apprehend his or her relationship to others and that his or her acts and choices have implications for other people";[6] and Constance L. Mui concludes that "the actual or possible presence of the Other's look could have the positive effect of keeping us honest and authentic."[7] These arguments that shame may lead us to begin caring about others are valuable. I wish, however, to go further by maintaining that receiving the look only in shame is bad faith because the look is the gift of the world. Indeed, I argue that the look is not fundamentally shame-inducing except insofar as one is in bad faith. Dolezal and Mui, as well as Katherine J. Morris, propose also that not all looks cause shame;[8] I will briefly return to this idea in the next section, but regardless of what distinctions might be made among looks, I argue that all looks give the world to others, whether the looker wants to give the world or not.

After considering Sartre's discussion of the look in *Being and Nothingness*, I turn to the *Notebooks for an Ethics*, which explore the possibility of authenticity, or the embracing of freedom. Even in the *Notebooks*, Sartre's explicit references to the look maintain the position that the look is inherently conflictual. He does, however, argue that people may give each other the world through valuing each other's freedom, and this discussion provides a useful background to my reevaluation of the look, which argues that the look gives the world to the one who is looked at regardless of the intentions or desires of anyone who

may be doing the looking. For the full resources for that reevaluation of the look, it is necessary to turn to Beauvoir's *Ethics of Ambiguity*: though she does not reference the look, she argues that others give me the world by taking it from me. I discover through the look that others may contest the values and meanings I assign to things—but it is the possibility of this contestation that establishes the world as the concrete arena within which I live out my project. The look reveals that I am a free being within a world that I share with others, that they too are free, and therefore that I must desire everyone's freedom if I desire my own.

The Look as the Occasion of Shame

In *Being and Nothingness*, the look appears as the occasion of shame. Sartre gives the example of suddenly realizing that someone is looking at me as I listen through a keyhole:[9] in this moment, I discover myself not as a subject in charge of the meaning of my actions but as an object for another who also assigns meaning to my actions and whose interpretations I cannot control. Shame is not guilt or remorse, for one who is ashamed may still think her conduct was right. Rather, shame is the awareness of myself as an object for others: "shame [...] is the recognition that I really *am* this object that the Other is looking at and judging. I can be ashamed only of my freedom insofar as it escapes me to become a *given* object."[10] If an individual were to conclude, entirely on her own, that she no longer wanted to listen at keyholes, she would not feel shame, as shame arises from the realization that someone else is interpreting one's actions: it is an experience of powerlessness before the other. It does not matter whether the other actually disapproves of listening at keyholes; even if she approves wholeheartedly, the mere fact that I am vulnerable to her judgment suffices for shame. No attempt to defend myself—by arguing, for example, that I was listening in order to obtain information that would save someone's life—can ever change the fact that I find myself irrevocably caught before the tribunal of the other. The other may judge me positively from the outset or may come to judge me positively after she hears my explanation, but she is nonetheless judging me. No matter what her final verdict on my behavior may be, it remains that for her I am an object with whatever determinate essence she assigns me.

Because I thus become an object for the other—a part of the other's world to which she assigns value—my transcendence is called into question. Transcendence, for Sartre, means that "human-reality is its

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own surpassing toward what it lacks; it surpasses itself toward the particular being that it would be if it were what it is."[11] In other words, consciousness, or the for-itself, is not purely and simply itself, in the way that a table is merely a table, but is constantly projecting itself toward its possibilities. Consciousness constructs itself rather than existing according to a predetermined essence—and yet "shame reveals to me that this being is what I *am*."[12] Although I am not a keyhole-listener by essence, I realize when the other looks at me that I am forevermore a person who chose to listen at this particular keyhole and who was caught doing so. This realization amounts to the discovery that the other's freedom limits my own: I must henceforth reckon with the inescapable fact that I am subject to the other's judgment, and my own judgments of myself will always take this fact into account in some way. I am not free to forget that the other is free to judge me; even the choice to disregard her judgments is itself a response to her. To put the point more strongly, I become a part of the other's world to which she assigns value, and I am not free to escape her world. As Sartre explains, "the other, *qua* look, is no more than that: my transcendence transcended."[13] The other transcends me because she assigns me a place within her own project, and my world now falls away in the face of her world. Before the encounter with the other, the world was mine in that it was the field within which I projected myself toward my possibilities, "but the Other's presence in his looking-look cannot help to reinforce the world; on the contrary it unworlds it because it actually makes it the case that the world escapes me."[14] Looked at by the other, I realize that she also looks at the rest of the world and assigns value to it. The vase that I constitute as a significant family heirloom may be, in her eyes, a hideous dustcatcher or an uninteresting knickknack, and in a sense I have lost the vase because it is no longer I alone who assign meaning to it. Even if she has never seen the vase, she could potentially do so and judge it; even is she thinks the vase is beautiful, she is still judging it, and I cannot control her judgment. Indeed, that listening at a keyhole is an act we would generally consider shameful in the ordinary sense of the word—that is, disgraceful—should not mislead us into thinking that shame, in the Sartrean sense, is associated only with such acts: if the other sees me proving a theorem or adopting a dog, I still become as an object for the other. I may want the other to think of me as a being who is good at math or kind to dogs, yet this very desire reveals my vulnerability before the other: I cannot simply make her view me as I wish she would, for she is a free being. Even being found doing something generally regarded as admirable is a discovery of my vulnerability before the other and is therefore an experience of shame

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before it can be an experience of pleasure or pride.[15] The crucial point is that the values I assign to things and actions no longer have the last word, as someone else also judges them.

Later, drawing on Beauvoir, I will argue that the look does "reinforce the world" and even gives me the world precisely because it "makes it the case that the world escapes me." For the moment, let us consider one more aspect of the presentation of the look in *Being and Nothingness*: the look alters even my own relationship to my body. According to Sartre, my body is not simply an object that belongs to me; rather, "I exist my body."[16] It is within the immanence of my bodily existence that I project myself toward my possibilities, and my body is not a prison for the soul but is fundamental to my being-in-the-world. Through my body, the world reveals itself to me; through my body, I assign meaning and value to the world. Yet the look steals my body as well: in the look, Sartre explains, "my body is not given merely as what I simply *live*; rather, in and through the contingent and absolute fact of the Other's existence, what I live is itself extended outside me, in a dimension of flight that escapes me."[17] When I become an object for the other, that becoming an object, like everything else that happens to me, occurs within my bodily existence. In shame, my body is no longer simply my own, for I am alienated even from it.

Before turning to the *Notebooks*, it is worth briefly considering Morris's reinterpretation of the look, which focuses on grace, clumsiness, and ugliness in *Being and Nothingness*. The graceful body, Sartre asserts, seems perfectly suited to its project, such that every movement is both free and apparently necessary for what it seeks to accomplish: "Grace, therefore, clothes and conceals facticity: the nakedness of the flesh is present in its entirety, but it cannot be *seen*."[18] Examining the ways in which graceful people and clumsy people are perceived, Morris contends that "not all types of Look are shame-inducing. [...] [T]he graceful dancer whose facticity 'is clothed and disguised by grace' is immune to shame, at least as long as the dance lasts."[19] The dancer, for Morris, is not looked at with hostility and so is not subject to shame. Here my reading of Sartre differs from Morris's: even if the dancer is too skilled to let the look disturb her, the look still subjects her to others' judgment, and I maintain that it is external judgment itself, whether positive, negative, or neutral, that Sartre sees as shame-inducing. Hence it does not matter, for Sartre, that others perceive her as normal or better. Morris also proposes, however, that "there is not just the hostile or ridiculing stare, but the Look which recognizes a fellow human being. (Some might prefer to say that not every look is a Look.)"[20] As the next section will explain, Sartre develops an account

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of mutual recognition in the *Notebooks* while also distinguishing such recognition from the look, which suggests, in accord with Morris's parenthetical, that a given instance of one person looking at another need not, on Sartre's view, be an instance of the look. My own argument, though, is that every look gives the world and that whether one receives the look only in shame depends on one's bad faith and not on the other's disposition. Still, the look of one who wishes to give me the world is not the same as the look of one who gives me the world despite herself, since, as we will see, the former sort of look includes the dimension of love.

The Look in Sartre's *Notebooks*, Part I: The Look as Theft

Sartre maintains throughout the *Notebooks* that authenticity, which is the embracing of freedom, entails valuing not only one's own freedom but also the freedom of all other people. Thus the relation to the other need not be conflictual, and indeed conceiving of that relation only in terms of conflict, as though one's own freedom were fundamentally opposed to that of others, is bad faith. The look, however, remains a moment of conflict between self and other, and embracing freedom therefore requires relating to others in a way that is not grounded in the look. In fact, Sartre argues, the look does not relate me to another person in her individuality; rather, it is society considered as a totality that looks at me through the look of any one person. As Sartre writes, "I first become conscious of [society] in the look of the other. […] And if I am being looked at, I have shown that this look is the undifferentiated look of Others."[21] Here it is crucial to understand that in shame, I discover not that any particular other definitely exists but that my transcendence *can* be transcended—that is, that my project can be subject to the interpretation of another. The look does not prove that there is in reality even one other person in the world; what it does prove is that my judgments and valuations are not universal but may be contested. Even if no one actually contradicts them, the mere fact that my judgments and valuations are not absolute suffices to reveal to me that I am not the master of the world. Looked at, I am aware, not that any specific individual is present, but that my judgments may themselves become objects of judgment. For this reason, Sartre argues that it is society, understood not as a group of individuals but as an amorphous mass of judgments and valuations other than my own, who looks at me. And therefore the look cannot

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ground a genuinely cooperative relation between myself and any actual other person.

The *Notebooks* also develop a second reason why the look cannot serve as a basis for positive relations between self and other: fully corroborating the account he previously gave in *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre maintains that the look is essentially a theft of the world. He bluntly states that "the other steals [the object] from me by inserting into its existence a layer of existence that is invisible in principle and that gets constituted in relation to me as a *being*: a being-in-principle-beyond-reach."[22] Although "the object is something transcendent that has no need of me *to be*"—it transcends me in that I did not create it and it does not depend on me—it remains the case that in the absence of others, "I make [it] exist (making being exist) *for me*,"[23] since I assign it a value and thereby determine its meaning. The object exists with or without me, but it is I who constitute it in terms of its significance, and thus I possess it. I cannot, however, possess for myself the object-as-judged-by-the-other. The particularly comfortable chair is mine; the garish, ugly chair that the other sees is not mine, although it is the same chair: because I do not control the other's judgments, I can never own the object whose significance is constituted by the other. For that matter, even if the other—and indeed society at large, since the look as Sartre portrays it does not relate me to any particular individual—agrees with me that it is a particularly comfortable chair that looks perfectly fine, I still do not own the chair-as-judged-by-the-other because, once again, I am not the ground of the other's judgments. The other takes the chair and assigns it some value on which I have no claim. Experiencing this theft, I do discover that I am not necessarily the only free being—but not only does the look fail to relate me to any particular free being, it is necessarily a conflictual encounter because it is an act of thievery.

A more positive relation with others must break free from the conflict that Sartre presents as inherent in the original encounter with alterity and permit me to recognize and be recognized by other individual human beings. According to Sartre, the possibility of such a relation arises when self and other recognize each other as beings who freely pursue certain ends and appeal to each other for freely given aid. In contrast to the look, this recognition acknowledges the other person as a specific individual whose goals arise within a concrete situation. Suppose, for instance, that I see someone who is picking up a load of books that she has dropped, or who has badly scraped her knees falling on the sidewalk and is trying to stop the bleeding, or who is trying to coax her cat out of a tree. In such cases, I may recog-

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nize that I am in the presence of another free being who is pursuing certain goals and to whom I could freely offer my help. Because I thereby acknowledge both her freedom and my own, "I recognize the other's freedom without being pierced [by] a look."[24] Her freedom does not steal my world but rather expands my world by opening for me the possibility of deciding to assist her. And if she asks me for help, verbally or otherwise, she in turn recognizes my freedom precisely because she does not demand that I help her but asks that I choose to do so. Indeed, since requesting help does expand my world without stealing it, such a request is a gift: as Sartre puts it, "In every appeal [*appel*] there is a gift. In the first place, there is a refusal to consider the original conflict between freedoms by way of the look as something impossible to surpass."[25] The other who makes an appeal, who calls to me, does not look at me in the technical, Sartrean sense of the word: by asking that I freely choose to help her, she acknowledges that I make my own judgments and valuations of the world. Rather than imposing her own judgments and valuations as absolute, she offers me the possibility of coexisting and even working together as judging, evaluating beings. The world is no longer mine alone, but neither is it only hers. The look constitutes me as an object; the appeal calls to me as a fellow free subject.

The Look in Sartre's *Notebooks*, Part II: The Look and the Gift

Interestingly, however, there is a passage in the *Notebooks* that hints at the possibility of thinking the look more positively, though Sartre himself does not take up this hint as such. He writes that "in the Hell of passions (described in BN), this revelation of the other is conceived of as a pure surpassing. […] But […] within this hell there is already generosity and creation. For in springing up within the world I give other For-itselves a new dimension of being."[26] This dimension of being is that of experiencing oneself not only as transcendent but also as factical, and it is a gift that others give to me as well: "through the Other I am enriched in a new dimension of Being: through the Other I come to exist in the dimension of Being, through the Other I become an object. And this is in no way a fall [*déchéance*] or a threat in itself. It will become one only if the Other refuses to see a freedom in me too."[27] It is only by encountering other conscious beings that the for-itself can come to experience itself not only as transcendent but also as an object. Apart from others, I might fail to accomplish

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my goals, but this failure of transcendence is not the full experience of facticity, which means existing contingently within a concrete situation that I did not choose and cannot wholly control, in which I not only act but am acted upon. Although I am within the world regardless, without others, I would not truly experience the vulnerability that existing within the world entails. As Sartre puts it, "[the other] does not invent this 'within-the-worldness'; were I alone in the world, an avalanche of boulders could crush me (except that I would only grasp this avalanche as an *accident to be avoided*); he unveils it, he thematizes my fragility."[28] The other, by perceiving me not only as free but as an object that can suffer harm, gives me the experience of myself as vulnerable, as existing within a world in which the accident is not necessarily avoidable. Consider a sharp rock that cuts me or a tree branch that breaks beneath me: neither the rock nor the tree can constitute me as an object or indeed as anything at all. Cut by the rock or falling from the tree in a world without others, I certainly would find myself in a situation that I did not wholly control, but I would not fully experience myself as limited by my contingency because my judgments and evaluations of the world would remain absolute. The sharp rock and the broken branch would assuredly be obstacles to my transcendence—but I would constitute them as obstacles to overcome and would thereby retain the supremacy of the solipsist. I would find, it is true, that I could not heal my wound with my mind or fly away from the breaking branch; moreover, I would find that I was consistently unable to heal injuries at will or to fly like a bird. Yet if no one arises to perceive these failures and to see me as a being-that-cannot-heal-itself-at-will or as a being-that-cannot-fly, they remain individual failures to overcome obstacles and not limits inherent in my situation.

More importantly, in solitude, I would know myself as the one who assigns meaning to all things, and I would not know that my project will conclude in death: since death is the negation of my subjective agency, I cannot discover that I will die without experiencing myself as an object, and only the other person can make me an object. What is more, being thrown into a contingent existence that I did not choose is also a negation of my subjective agency, and so without the other, I could not experience my radical contingency. It is through the encounter with the other, therefore, that I realize my limits, including the most fundamental limit to my existence, which is that I cannot become my own ground. Hence it is the encounter with the other that enables me to realize the futility of the project of becoming God—the original project of bad faith, in which one seeks to transcend one's situation to the point of grounding one's own factical

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existence, dependent on nothing but oneself.[29] I am responsible for my inability to fly, to heal myself, and, most importantly, to ground my own existence inasmuch as I am the one who has to take up those impossibilities and to account for them in my project. But I cannot annul my fragility, my finitude, my mortality; I can only choose what meaning I assign to them. And the same is true of the other, to whom I may give existence within the world as she may give it to me: "in authenticity I choose to unveil the Other. I *too* am going to create men in the world."[30] This creation is a matter of "discover[ing] the total contingency, the absolute fragility, the finitude, and the mortality of the one who is proposing this goal to himself."[31] This gift is a strange one, to be sure, but it is truly a gift. In this passage, Sartre does not use the term *grace*, but in this recognition of another's fragility, finitude, and mortality, we may legitimately read an offer of grace: my limits become meaningful through the other's recognition of them, and vice versa.[32] It is impossible for me to become my own ground, and when I experience this impossibility through the encounter with the other, I am thereby opened to the possibility of seeking to live authentically, not striving to become God but recognizing that my freedom arises within a concrete situation to which I must choose my response. And the other, discovering the futility of bad faith through the encounter with me just as I discover it through the encounter with her, is likewise opened to the possibility of the project of authenticity. In her examination of the influence of the Christian understanding of sin on Sartre's thought, Kate Kirkpatrick observes that in *Being and Nothingness,* "Sartre offers a view of fallenness from a *graceless* position."[33] Here, however, in the unfinished and posthumously published *Notebooks for an Ethics*, we see what may validly be considered Sartrean grace.

It may still seem implausible to speak of grace in a Sartrean context, especially since Sartre famously maintains, in the *Notebooks* as in his other works, that there is no transcendent law by which the for-itself could be justified. Certainly, the other does not justify my limits, nor I hers. Rather, the other gives me the world as the arena within which I am free, and no longer merely as something to be transcended, and I make this same gift to her. For me in my solitude the world is an obstacle to transcend. The other's recognition of my fragility, finitude, and mortality is, however, a recognition of my inability to escape the world—and because I cannot escape the world, whether alone or alongside others, it is only within the world that I can exercise my freedom. Thus, through the encounter with the other, the world is revealed as the condition of my freedom—and through her encounter

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with me, the world is revealed as the condition of her freedom. The gift of within-the-worldness that I receive from the other therefore gives me my facticity and transcendence together. Crucially, willing to give this gift is loving the other: as Sartre puts it,

> through me *there is* a vulnerability of the Other, but I will this vulnerability since he surpasses it and it has to be there so that he can surpass it. Thus one will love the gauntness, the nervousness of this politician or that doctor, who pushes aside and overworks this thin, nervous body and *forgets* it. For it is made to be forgotten by him (and for rediscovering itself transposed into his work) yet, on the contrary, to be thematized or objectified by me. This vulnerability, this finitude is *the body*. The body for others. To unveil the other in his being-within-the-world is to love him in his body.[34]

In the absence of others, the for-itself would relate even to its body only by seeking to transcend it and its limits. But valuing another's freedom means also valuing her body, since it is only as an embodied being that she exists within the world, and therefore it is only as an embodied being that she can be free. Without the body and its attendant limits, transcendence would be a meaningless concept: she would have nothing to transcend and no way to act within the world. This love gives the other her very body, in all its limited particularity, as the basis of her freedom. Thus we may legitimately speak of grace in this context: I redeem the other's limits as necessary to her freedom, and she does the same for me. Grace, in this sense, is not the same as the grace that is opposed to awkwardness and that Morris analyzes, and I lack the space to examine their relation fully, but I suggest that one who loves another in her body confers grace on her very awkwardness precisely by recognizing and valuing her body as necessary for her free action within the world. It is not a question of concealing her facticity but of loving it, such that her awkwardness becomes a sort of gracefulness because it is only in and through her awkward body that she lives out her project.[35]

Kirkpatrick has highlighted the resemblence between the pessimistic depiction of human existence in *Being and Nothingness* and "the Jansenist–Augustinian view of original sin," according to which "the *libido dominandi* drives human beings to objectify others."[36] It is interesting, therefore, in light of the more optimistic perspective of the *Notebooks*, to consider Augustine's statement in *On the Free Choice of the Will* that "the human will does not attain grace through its freedom, but rather attains its freedom through grace."[37] To say that Sartre's understanding of freedom in the *Notebooks* remains different from Augustine's is an understatement, since Augustine viewed freedom and the possibility of using that freedom rightly as gifts from

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God. Felix Ó Murchadha, writing on grace in Augustine and Jean-Luc Marion, observes that for Marion, "the freedom of the gifted is [...] a leap of faith which loves but needs a divine command to do so with orientation and sense."[38] Sartrean grace, in contrast to Augustinian or Marionian grace, is immanent and contingent, since I, the world, and others are all unjustified and unjustifiable, and there is no "divine command" by which I could orient my love. But it remains that for Sartre, I am not free alone: I exist alongside others and cannot coherently seek only my own freedom. Thanks to others, I receive the world as the arena within which I am free. This gift of the world does not tell me what to do with my freedom—it does not even command me to value freedom—but it does inaugurate my freedom and therefore operates as a strictly contingent, secular grace.

If becoming an object for another may be a means of grace, might it then be possible to reconsider the look? Only through the existence of others do I discover that I exist within the world as a freedom. And if that discovery indeed becomes possible "within this hell" described in *Being and Nothingness*, then my existence must be conditioned by the existence of others whether or not they love me, whether or not they will to give me the world. Again, though, in the midst of this same passage, Sartre conceives of the look in the terms first laid out in *Being and Nothingness*: "But how can one unveil the Other as freedom? One can no doubt—and this comes first—grasp the Other as a look. But this disquieting, undifferentiated, and intermittent freedom is not the freedom of this Other; it is the intuition of another freedom in general."[39] I can meaningfully embrace others' freedom only in the context of their concrete projects, but Sartre reiterates here that the look does not even show that any actual, concrete persons exist. Hence he maintains that the look cannot serve to ground positive relations between myself and other people. Reading Beauvoir's portrayal of the encounter with others in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* in conjunction with this discussion of love and within-the-worldness in the *Notebooks* will, however, provide the resources for a reevaluation of the look. Sartre, I argue, conflates love and the gift of the world: the other gives me the world and my body whether or not she wants to, and I give her the world and her body whether or not I want to, but in love one does will to give these gifts to the other. To love the other is therefore to offer a profound grace, but there is already grace at work in the look regardless.

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Rethinking the Look with Beauvoir's *Ethics of Ambiguity*

In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, which was first published in 1947, the year Sartre began writing the *Notebooks*, Beauvoir proposes an ethics based on the embracing of freedom, one's own and that of others.[40] She acknowledges the moment of conflict that Sartre describes in *Being and Nothingness*, even writing that "indeed at every moment others are stealing the whole world from me. The first movement is to hate them."[41] This theft of the world, as well as the initial hatred of others, recalls the experience of the look as Sartre portrays it, though Beauvoir does not use that term; indeed, the word "look" (*regard*) appears only a few times in the text, and never in an explicitly Sartrean sense. Immediately, however, she argues that in fact my world is constituted by others through the very theft of it:

> But this hatred is naïve, and the desire immediately struggles against itself. If I were really everything there would be nothing beside me; the world would be empty. There would be nothing to possess, and I myself would be nothing. […] [B]y taking the world away from me, others also give it to me, since a thing is given to me only by the movement which snatches it from me.[42]

Here her analysis crucially differs from Sartre's: Sartre, as we have seen, sharply distinguishes the theft of the world and the gift of the world. For Beauvoir, however, the theft and the gift cannot be thus separated, such that it is actually "naïve" to regard the theft as fundamental. If I were alone in the world, the world for me would consist only of the values and meanings I assigned to things. The other, by potentially contesting those assignments, gives the world that resistance to me that is necessary for my freedom: it is only thanks to the existence of others who also assign meanings and values to things that I can experience the world as something that is truly distinct from myself. In other words, it is others who give me the world as that within which I exist and choose my project. The idea of an isolated for-itself is nonsensical, since the for-itself's transcendence can operate only within a concrete situation, and it is only through others that concrete situations are constituted. The gift of the world is more fundamental than the theft of the world, since without others there would be no world that could be stolen.

Beauvoir's approach suggests the possibility of the positive conception of the look that Sartre rules out, since she argues that the world is given to me by and through the existence of others who may contest the values that I assign to things. This gift of the world consti-

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tutes my freedom, for freedom can operate only within some concrete situation within the world: as Beauvoir writes, "freedom realizes itself only by engaging itself in the world."[43] A supposed freedom with no concrete arena in which to accomplish anything cannot truly be said to be free; it would be nothing at all. Moreover, Beauvoir and Sartre both maintain that, since my freedom is constituted by others, I cannot coherently pursue my own freedom without seeking the freedom of others as well. But it is precisely the look that reveals to me that there are others who may contest my value assignments with evaluations of their own and whose projects may interfere with my own. Through the look, therefore, it is given to me to discover that I am free, and that if I am to embrace my own freedom I must strive, in my situated, embodied existence, for everyone else's freedom as well. Indeed, through becoming a body-for-others, I am not only alienated from my body but also, in the same movement, receive my body as that which I exist, as that in and through which I am engaged in the world and interact with others. The very moment of alienation reveals that I am not alone in my embodied existence but always exist in relation to others, and therefore it reveals that I cannot be free alone, as if other people's freedom had nothing to do with me. Still, despite the gift of the world and even of my body, I may remain trapped in the initial movement of hatred—the movement of bad faith. If, however, I accept that others give me the world and choose to receive the world as a gift, I may then come to seek both my own and others' freedom. The transcending of my transcendence revealed in the look does not destroy my transcendence but opens a place for it within a society of others.

Let us not move too quickly here. It might seem that Sartre's statement that the look does not reveal to me the existence of any particular individuals poses an insuperable obstacle to the argument that the look gives me the world. Recall, however, that Beauvoir writes that the initial response to others is to hate them. The refusal to respond to the look by recognizing any particular individual is, then, part of this hatred. It is not that the look inherently fails to relate me to any particular person; rather, if I persist in the bad-faith project of desiring to be God, it will seem to me that the look only shames me and steals the world from me. And if I do not accept that the look also gives the world to me, then I will not proceed to realize either my own freedom or the inseparability of my freedom from that of the other particular individuals who also exist within the world. Looked at, my initial response is to hate others and to refuse to recognize them as individuals; then, however, I can go on to recognize that the theft of the world

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is also, and more fundamentally, the gift of the world, that there are other free individuals who also have projects, and that if I desire my own freedom I must also desire theirs. Sartre's account of the look, in the Notebooks as well as in Being and Nothingness, should thus be read as a description of receiving the look in bad faith.[44]

It remains the case, on my analysis, that the look is not a logical proof that any particular entity that I take for a person is in fact a person; rather, the look is the experience of discovering that others have projects in the world, and it calls me to embrace the fact that there are other free individuals who give me the world and whose freedom cannot be separated from my own. Learning what any individual's project is or acquiring evidence that an apparent person really is a person and not a robot or hallucination comes only after the experience of the look. It is also true, therefore, that the look does not establish cooperation between myself and another, even if I seek to reject the initial movement of bad faith, as cooperation requires more than the discovery that there are other free individuals. Nonetheless, experiencing the connection of my freedom with others' freedom calls me to seek the freedom of all people, though I may still maintain the position of bad faith that refuses to value freedom. By revealing others' freedom, the look calls me to pursue both my own freedom and others', but I can choose whether to recognize this call or reject it in shame and hatred.

This reexamination of the look in no way denies the reality of oppression. Even the look of the oppressor reveals to me that I am not alone in the world and that I must take this fact into account when responding to oppression—though how to do so is a complex question beyond the scope of this article. The point is that even when my relation to another is one of conflict, the look reveals to me the possibility of a more positive relation to other people, precisely because it reveals not only that others can seek to destroy my freedom but also that my freedom is fundamentally constituted in relation to others. The conflictual relation to others cannot be fundamental because the attempt to destroy my freedom is an implicit admission that I am free and hence presupposes my freedom, and also because my freedom would be meaningless without the freedom of others. The constitution of my freedom in and through the relation to others is originary ~~(primary?)~~, and the violence that arises is secondary to it. The look functions as a call to the pursuit of freedom not because the other intends to summon me to pursue freedom, but because it reveals that my existence cannot coherently be lived in isolation. If the other is an oppressor whose project is to steal the world from me, the look still indicates the necessity of pursuing concrete freedom: if my freedom

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were not concrete, the world would be irrelevant to it, and so no one could meaningfully attempt to steal it. To discover that someone seeks to steal the world from me is to discover that violence and oppression are acts of bad faith, as Sartre and Beauvoir both argue, and that I cannot be liberated alone but must also seek the liberation of others.

Conclusion: The Look and the Possibility of Grace

The call to seek freedom that is revealed in the look is not the love that Sartre describes in the *Notebooks*, since it does not depend on the other willing my freedom. The grace that gives me the world and inaugurates my freedom is, however, already at work in the call itself, and therefore in the look. Beauvoir writes that "if it is true that every project emanates from a subjectivity, it is also true that this subjective movement establishes by itself a surpassing of subjectivity. Man can find a justification of his own existence only in the existence of other men."[45] This justification is not justification by a transcendent moral law, which Sartre and Beauvoir both deny. Rather, Beauvoir is arguing that the only way to constitute one's free existence as meaningful is through pursuing freedom in concrete situations alongside others: only by valuing the freedom of all people do I value my own freedom, and so the only coherent way to treat my freedom as significant is to work for the liberation of all. It is the look that calls into question the primacy of the subject, and shame and hatred are the reactions of the for-itself that insists on its own supremacy, that wishes in its turn to objectify the other. The self that abandons itself wholly to bad faith cannot bear to share the world with others; wishing to be its own ground, it would rather reject its freedom than acknowledge that its freedom depends on others. But the look also calls me to emerge from this shame and hatred into the pursuit of freedom alongside others within the world. Though it does not go as far as the fuller grace that is the love Sartre describes in the *Notebooks*, this call may legitimately be considered an operation of grace, since it does offer me the possibility of pursuing freedom. It is, moreover, prior to that fuller grace, since the look is my first encounter with others. The look is not love, but it raises the possibility of love. The look already gives me the world and my body; love comes with the choice to value the other's freedom, and it is a more profound grace because it is not only a call to pursue freedom but is specifically a call to pursue freedom with and alongside another. The look summons me to reject hatred and gives me the world; love already rejects hatred and is glad to give me the world.

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Essential to the gift is that it does not belong to the economy of exchange. The other and I do not give each other the world in return for anything or in order to receive a return. One who looks does not know what will come of the look and may not even intend to give anything at all. In this respect, the dynamics of the look accord remarkably with Marion's statement that "the gift demands, in order to give *itself*—therefore to let it make its own decision about itself—giving without return or response."[46] While it may seem that the differences between Sartre and Marion can scarcely be exaggerated, it remains that the look gives me the world even if the looker wants to steal the world and even if I myself am angry and ashamed to receive the world from others. Reading Sartre's discussion of the gift and counter-gift in the *Notebooks*, which is prior to his discussion of love, Ruud Welten notes that the gift, for Sartre, falls into the economy of exchange once it becomes material.[47] The look, though, avoids this dynamic because what is given is not any specific material object but rather the world as the arena within which I exercise my freedom—or, in other words, the possibility of exercising my freedom within the world. Love, with its additional dimension of respect for the other's freedom, refuses, because of that very respect, to control what the other might do by demanding or offering compensation. To value freedom is to realize that it cannot be traded for anything. Thus the appeal and the response to the appeal do not take place as an exchange, for the one who appeals and the one who responds both know better than to try to measure, demand, or control the other's freedom.[48]

I do not propose that rejecting bad faith is a simple matter; if it were easy to pursue freedom, *Being and Nothingness* could have been a much shorter work. Indeed, I have argued elsewhere that it is impossible to avoid bad faith entirely, and that acting as if such a thing were possible is itself bad faith.[49] In any case, the world is filled with oppression, and grace cannot, consistently with a Sartrean or Beauvoirian framework, promise a complete redemption: we cannot count on an end to all oppression. Kate Kirkpatrick writes that for Sartre, "without God, the human can do nothing to save himself."[50] Here I have argued for an interpretation of the look with more room for love and grace than Kirkpatrick's *Sartre on Sin*, which does not discuss the *Notebooks*, depicts as possible within a Sartrean perspective,[51] and indeed with more room for grace than Sartre himself seemed to consider possible, even in the *Notebooks*. This framework does not, however, permit us any hope in a full salvation, if by that we mean the liberation of the world from conflict and hatred. Even if a Sartrean framework does not forbid such a possibility, it does not and cannot provide any

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assurance that it will be accomplished. Here, we must be mindful of Sartre's emphasis on contingency. Richard Kearney writes that "seeing the world as gift is wagering on grace over chance—and there is [...] but a hairline difference between them."[52] Considering Sartre's insistence on the radical contingency of the world and of the for-itself's own existence, "seeing the world as gift" through a Sartrean lens is, rather, wagering on the grace of chance. For Sartre, I, the world, and the others who give it to me all exist by chance, unjustifiably, but that the world is thus given to me is a grace. Through the look, the world in all its contingency becomes the arena within which I act freely, and there is no telling what may ensue. *Being and Nothingness* refuses to "rule out the possibility of a morality of deliverance and salvation";[53] ultimately, though, Sartrean ethics is better understood as a morality of the pursuit of deliverance and salvation. Sartrean grace only goes so far, but it goes farther than the traditional understanding of the look suggests.

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Notes

1. I wish to thank an anonymous reviewer for valuable comments on an earlier version of this article.
2. Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Être et le néant* [1943] (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 453 (hereafter *EN*); *Being and Nothingness,* translated by Sarah Richmond (New York: Washington Square Press, 2018), 543 (hereafter *BN*). Sartre also writes in another footnote that "if it is a matter of indifference whether to be in good or in bad faith [...], that does not mean that we are unable radically to escape from bad faith" (*EN,* 106; *BN*, 117).
3. Sartre, *EN*, 676; *BN*, 811.
4. Lisa Guenther, "Shame and the temporality of social life," *Continental Philosophy Review* 44, no. 1 (2011): 23-39, here 25.
5. Luna Dolezal, "Reconsidering the Look in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*," *Sartre Studies International* 18, no. 1 (2012): 9-28, here 24. Ellie Anderson also argues

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that Sartre's discussion of the look illustrates the self's "direct relation to the world of others," but she concludes that the Sartrean self still desires to "synthesiz[e] being-for-itself and being-in-itself" (Anderson, "Sartre's Affective Turn: Shame and Recognition in 'The Look,'" *Philosophy Today* 65, no. 3 (2021): 709-26, here 720 and 722).

6. Ruth Kitchen, "From Shame towards an Ethics of Ambiguity," *Sartre Studies International* 19, no. 1 (2013): 55-70, here 66-67.
7. Constance L. Mui, "Intersubjectivity and 'the Look,'" in *The Sartrean Mind*, ed. Matthew C. Eshleman and Constance L. Mui, 212-24 (New York: Routledge, 2020), 224.
8. Dolezal, "Reconsidering the Look in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*," 23-24; Mui, "Intersubjectivity and 'the Look,'" 223; and Katherine J. Morris, "The Graceful, the Ungraceful, and the Disgraceful," in *Reading Sartre: On Phenomenology and Existentialism*, ed. Jonathan Webber, 130-44 (New York: Routledge, 2011), 142. I return to Morris in the next section.
9. Sartre, *EN*, 298-304; *BN*, 355-62.
10. Sartre, *EN*, 300; *BN*, 358, translation modified.
11. Sartre, *EN*, 125; *BN*, 142, translation modified.
12. Sartre, *EN*, 301; *BN*, 359.
13. Sartre, *EN*, 302; *BN*, 360.
14. Sartre, *EN*, 311; *BN*, 371.
15. Sartre explains that "as for pride, it does not exclude original shame. It is built even in the territory of fundamental shame, or the shame of being an object. [...] In a sense, therefore, pride is in the first instance resignation: in order to be proud *of being that*, it is necessary for me first to be resigned to *being only that*. It is a matter therefore of an initial reaction to shame and it is already a reaction of flight and bad faith because, without ceasing to regard the Other as a subject, I try to apprehend myself as *affecting* the Other through my objecthood" (*EN*, 329-30; *BN*, 394). If I am proud that the other defines me in a way I approve of, I am crediting myself with at least being an object that the other cannot but judge positively. In this way I conceal from myself the truth that I do not control the other's judgment. Pride is thus an attempt to evade shame, which is ontologically prior to pride.
16. Sartre, *EN*, 392; *BN*, 468.
17. Sartre, *EN*, 392; *BN*, 469.
18. Sartre, *EN*, 441; *BN*, 528, translation modified, ellipsis in original.
19. Morris, "The Graceful, the Ungraceful, and the Disgraceful," 142.
20. Ibid., 142.
21. Sartre, *CM*, 118; *NE*, 111, translation modified.
22. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Cahiers pour une morale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), 289 (hereafter *CM*); *Notebooks for an Ethics,* Trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 277 (hereafter *NE*), translation modified.
23. Sartre, *CM*, 289; *NE*, 277-78, translation modified.
24. Sartre, *CM*, 291; *NE*, 279.
25. Sartre, *CM*, 293; *NE*, 281.
26. Sartre, *CM*, 515; *NE*, 499.
27. Sartre, *CM*, 515; *NE*, 499-500, translation modified.
28. Sartre, *CM*, 515; *NE*, 500.
29. See Sartre, *EN* 662; *BN*, 796-97.
30. Sartre, *CM*, 515; *NE*, 500.
31. Sartre, *CM*, 515; *NE*, 501.

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32. Tim Huntley also connects fragility and grace in Sartre, though he does not describe the recognition of another's fragility as a means of grace: reading Sartre's "Tintoretto: Saint George and the Dragon," he argues for a Sartrean grace found in the possibility of action that arises within situated human fragility. See Huntley, "'Grace Revealed and Erased': Sartre on Tintoretto's Modest Plenitude," *Sartre Studies International* 18, no. 1 (2012): 49-65, especially 57-61.
33. Kate Kirkpatrick, *Sartre on Sin: Between Being and Nothingness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 160.
34. Sartre, *CM*, 515; *NE*, 501.
35. Morris proposes that clumsiness is one of many qualities that are partly defined by others' negative reactions ("The Graceful, the Ungraceful, and the Disgraceful," 137-38), and love frees the loved person from this aspect of clumsiness. I argue that regardless of the intentions of the looker, the look gives the looked-at person her body as that in and through which she lives out her project; still, being loved does make one's existence within the world easier.
36. Ibid., 160. See also Kate Kirkpatrick, *Sartre and Theology* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), chapters 2-3, 41-86.
37. Augustine, *On the Free Choice of the Will, On Grace and Free Choice, and Other Writings*, trans. Peter King (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 200.
38. Felix Ó Murchadha, "Givenness, Grace, and Marion's Augustinianism," in *Breached Horizons: The Philosophy of Jean-Luc Marion*, ed. Rachel Bath, Antonio Calcagno, Kathryn Lawson, and Steve G. Lofts, 65-78 (New York: Roman and Littlefield International, 2018), 75.
39. Sartre, *CM*, 515; *NE*, 500.
40. The exact extent of Beauvoir's influence on Sartre, and vice versa, is beyond the scope of this paper. I take *The Ethics of Ambiguity* as a reexamination of the self's relation to others that does differ from Sartre's analysis in *Being and Nothingness* insofar as the latter work offers no indication of how we might escape bad faith. And while I do take the ontology of *The Ethics of Ambiguity* to be largely Sartrean, I do argue, as will become clear, that Beauvoir implicitly reevaluates the look. Christine Daigle maintains that "[Beauvoir] shows that the ontology of *Being and Nothingness* does not need to be entirely rejected in order for authenticity to be possible. What is required is to rethink the for-itself, to move beyond conflict, convert oneself to freedom, subsume the desire to be God to freedom, and recognize oneself as a being-with-others that depends on the freedom of others. All of this is consistent with the way the for-itself and its relation to the in-itself is defined in Sartre's treatise" ("The Ethics of Authenticity," in *Reading Sartre: Phenomenology and Existentialism,* ed. Jonathan Webber (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 1-14, here 13). This conclusion, according to which Beauvoir's ethics is not a rejection of *Being and Nothingness* but does in some ways go beyond it, is consistent with my argument here.
41. Simone de Beauvoir, *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté suivi de Pyrrhus et Cinéas* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947), 101 (hereafter *MA*); *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Philosophical Library, 1948), 70 (hereafter *EA*).
42. Beauvoir, *MA*, 101-02; *EA*, 71.
43. Beauvoir, *MA*, 114; *EA*, 78.
44. Highlighting the limits of the notions of subjectivity and objectivity, Daniel O'Shiel argues that "complete shame" is bad faith but still associates shame with "being-looked-at" (O'Shiel, "Public egos: constructing a Sartrean theory of

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(inter)personal relations," *Continental Philosophy Review* 48, no. 3 [2015]: 273-96, here 295).

45. Beauvoir, *MA*, 103-04; *EA*, 72.
46. Jean-Luc Marion, *Étant donné*, 2nd ed. (Paris: PUF, 2013), 149; *Being and Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 89. There is little work relating Sartre and Marion; one exception is Stéphane Vinolo, "Jean-Paul Sartre and Jean-Luc Marion: For the Love of God," *Journal for Continental Philosophy of Religion* 4, no. 1 (2022): 25-40, which evaluates Sartre's conception of love in *Being and Nothingness*. Additional work on Sartre and Marion that deals with the *Notebooks for an Ethics* would be welcome; I lack the space for a more detailed treatment of Marion here.
47. Ruud Welten, "Jean-Paul Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics*: The Ontology of the Gift," *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* 15, no. 1 (2015): 3-15, especially 10-13.
48. Similarly, Anderson argues that for Beauvoir, ethics is reciprocal but cannot be a matter of exchange precisely because we must respect others' freedom. See Ellie Anderson, "From existential alterity to ethical reciprocity: Beauvoir's alternative to Levinas," *Continental Philosophy Review* 52, no. 2 (2019):171-89, especially 181-82.
49. See Sarah Horton, "The Authentic Person's Limited Bad Faith," *Sartre Studies International* 23, no. 2 (2017): 82–97.
50. Kirkpatrick, *Sartre on Sin*, 224.
51. More recently, in Kate Kirkpatrick, "'Master, Slave, and Merciless Struggle': Sin and Lovelessness in Sartre's *Saint Genet*," *Sartre Studies International* 25, no. 1 (2019): 22-34, Kirkpatrick observes that in *Saint Genet*, "although Genet never achieves it, Sartre describes love as desiring 'reciprocity' (*G*, 527) and even seems to imply 'salvation' can be achieved through love where reciprocity is present (*G*, 114)" (ibid., 30). Without mentioning grace, she argues that Sartre's acknowledgement of the possibility of reciprocal love is due to Beauvoir's influence (ibid., 30-31).
52. Richard Kearney and James Wood, "Imagination, Anatheism, and the Sacred," in *Reimagining the Sacred: Richard Kearney Debates God*, ed. Richard Kearney and Jens Zimmermann, 19-45 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 44.
53. *EN,* 453; *BN,* 543.

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