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The Authentic Person's Limited Bad Faith

I argue that Jean-Paul Sartre's treatment of bad faith and authenticity indicates not only that it is impossible for practical reasons to entirely avoid bad faith, but also that authenticity itself entails a certain degree of bad faith. Although much has been written (notably by Ronald Santoni) about the bad faith of violence and the contexts in which Sartre accepts violence even though it is bad faith, the many analyses of this topic stop short of my contention that one can be authentic *only if* one does accept a limited bad faith. It is valuable but insufficient to observe that, from a strictly practical perspective, one cannot entirely avoid bad faith because it is simply impossible to fight all oppression and never sacrifice anyone's freedom to any extent. One must further note that the authentic person must, for ontological reasons, be in bad faith to a limited degree: the very nature of the for-itself is incompatible with a "perfect" authenticity that *a priori* excludes bad faith, so it is already bad faith to seek to avoid bad faith at all costs despite the practical impossibility of doing so.

In short, drawing on *Being and Nothingness* and *Notebooks for an Ethics*, I argue that because the for-itself is a being "which is not what it is and which is what it is not,"¹ the for-itself cannot be authentic in the way that a table is a table, but rather it is necessarily authentic in the mode of not being authentic. And because authenticity is a project that one lives out in concrete existence, not a fixed essence or a categorical moral law, it does not free the authentic person from the responsibility of deciding whether or not to use violence. The project of authenticity cannot be detached from the concrete situation in which the for-itself exists and in which violence is inevitable, or it would cease to be authentic. But although it is impossible to avoid

bad faith, one can limit one's bad faith by acknowledging one's responsibility for it, and this limited bad faith is compatible with – and indeed necessary to – authenticity.

Preliminary Remarks

First, it is useful to define authenticity and bad faith, although the subsequent discussion will further refine our understanding of them. Authenticity, according to Sartre, is a “thematic grasping of freedom, of gratuity, of unjustifiability.”² In short, the authentic person embraces that freedom, accepting that she is absolutely responsible for all her choices and that there is no moral law by which she could be justified. Bad faith, in contrast, is a lived contradiction because it seeks to flee that freedom which is constitutive of the for-itself's being. Sartre explains that bad faith “must affirm facticity as *being* transcendence and transcendence as *being* facticity, in such a way that at the instant when a person apprehends the one, he can find himself abruptly faced with the other.”³ Thus one who is in bad faith seeks to escape the play of transcendence (by virtue of which the for-itself is never simply what it is) and facticity (the concrete situation of the for-itself) in order to evade responsibility. For example, I might insist that I transcend my cowardice in order to appear as one who is in fact not a coward⁴; conversely, I might confess that I am a coward in order to appear to transcend my cowardice through that very confession.⁵ To be authentic, one must accept both one's transcendence and one's facticity – that is, one must accept that one is a freedom in a concrete situation. And as I will argue, authenticity entails accepting that it is impossible to avoid bad faith altogether.

One could object to my project from the outset by citing two footnotes in *Being and Nothingness*: Sartre asserts that “[i]f it is indifferent whether one is in good or in bad faith [...], that does not mean that we can not radically escape bad faith,”⁶ and later, discussing being-for-others, he maintains that “[t]hese considerations do not exclude the possibility of an ethics of

deliverance and salvation. But this can be achieved only after a radical conversion which we can not discuss here.”⁷ And in the *Notebooks*, Sartre also declares that authenticity “transcends the dialectic of sincerity and bad faith.”⁸ Do these statements not indicate that an authenticity uncontaminated by any bad faith is possible? My reply to this has two parts. First, this article aims to show that when we examine Sartre’s working out of the notion of authenticity, it becomes apparent that authenticity must involve a limited bad faith, even though Sartre never uses this expression. Second, however, I contend that there is in fact a radical difference between limiting one’s bad faith by accepting one’s responsibility for it and remaining entirely in bad faith by fleeing one’s responsibility altogether. We certainly can escape the total bad faith that Sartre discusses in *Being and Nothingness*, and it is still appropriate to describe this escape as “a radical conversion” or even as a transcendence of bad faith because, as will become clear in the third section of this article, moving from unlimited bad faith to authenticity does reorient one’s being towards concrete freedom, and this reorientation is a radical shift from the bad-faith attempt to reject concrete freedom. My conclusion is by no means the pessimistic assertion that the analysis of bad faith in *Being and Nothingness* is all that can be said on the matter; rather, I call for an account of authenticity that fully attends to what it means to be a situated freedom.

The Bad Faith of Violence

To understand this account of authenticity, it is necessary to briefly examine Sartre’s account of violence, which will also provide the basis for a more detailed discussion of bad faith. A contradiction appears in all acts of violence: as Sartre explains, “[i]n violence one treats a freedom like a thing, all the while recognizing its nature as freedom.”⁹ Only another for-itself can recognize one’s freedom, so one wishes to preserve the other’s freedom to the extent necessary to obtain the desired recognition. But because the violent person objectifies others

while demanding they freely recognize that objectification, the violent person's act is inherently contradictory. Sartre argues, moreover, that "oppression implies that neither the slave nor the tyrant fundamentally recognizes their own freedom. One oppresses only if one oppresses himself. The oppressor is oppressed by the oppressed and by himself. If I fully recognize my freedom, I also recognize that of others."¹⁰ Thus the flight from freedom that characterizes bad faith¹¹ inheres in the structure of oppression, so one who commits violence is necessarily in bad faith.

Despite the bad faith of violence, however, Sartre contends that violence is sometimes a legitimate tactic. Much has been written about this topic,¹² but it is useful to recall in order to then proceed to the unexamined claim that the authentic person *must*, if she is to be authentic, be in bad faith to some degree. While Sartre's justifications of bad faith are largely implicit, he does explicitly justify it in the case of lying, and his justification suggests the idea of a limited bad faith. Santoni writes that he "can think of only one place where Sartre seems explicitly to permit a justification of bad faith": namely, Sartre's discussion in *Notebooks for an Ethics* of party leaders lying to members of their party.¹³ In this situation, Sartre explains, "[e]verything happens as if one said, 'If you freely want to attain this end, you should freely want the means of attaining it, so you should want to be lied to if necessary.' But the reality is that one does not say this. To the extent that it is implicitly understood, there is a justification of bad faith by the underlying freedom"¹⁴ Although lying is bad faith, members of a political party implicitly understand that their leaders may need to lie to them to accomplish the party's goal, so they desire that their leaders lie to them if lying is the best way to accomplish that goal. If the members recognize their responsibility for desiring that the leaders treat them as a means in order to attain the end, they are not hiding from their freedom. In that case, their freedom justifies the lies and thus also

the bad faith inherent in the lies. This bad faith is limited only insofar as the party members – both the ordinary members and the leaders – understand, at least implicitly, that they freely desire that the leaders lie if it is necessary to achieve the goals the members freely desire. Both the members and the leaders must recognize their responsibility for this situation. If they hide from their responsibility, or if the leaders manipulate the members without regard for their common goals, the bad faith is then unlimited. Thus according to Sartre, it is sometimes possible to recognize that one is freely choosing bad faith, and this recognition of one's freedom limits but does not eliminate the bad faith.

Furthermore, while it would be bad faith to declare that others who are violent bear the responsibility for one's own choice to use violence, Sartre recognizes, at least implicitly, that the oppressed may, in certain situations, have no alternative save violence, even violence that goes beyond lying. He notes, for example, that "[t]he universe of violence is the justification of violence."¹⁵ Certainly it would be bad faith to declare that others who are violent bear the responsibility for one's own choice to use violence, and it does not follow that people should welcome violence under all circumstances, but violence may at times be necessary to accomplish a concrete goal: as Sartre observes, "if the goal is concrete and finite, if it is in a future on a human scale, it must exclude violence (unless it is itself violence and evil), and if one is obliged to have recourse to violence to attain it, the violence will at least appear unjustifiable and limited. It will be the failure at the heart of the success."¹⁶ Violence is inherently a failure to respect everyone's freedom, yet even so, I might be obliged to use violence, for if I avoid violence I may fail to prevent abuses that are greater than my use of violence would have been. Hence *not* using violence can itself be a failure to respect everyone's freedom and so be bad faith. But as violence is always bad faith, there are cases in which one is in bad faith no matter what one does. There is

no way to opt out of a system in which violence is sometimes necessary – and in which there are so many injustices that I cannot fight all of them.

This discussion of violence thus indicates the practical reason for the inevitability of bad faith: at times, one must sacrifice some people's freedom, even if one's ultimate goal is freedom. Sartre elaborates on this problem in "What is Literature?", explaining that "[s]uch is the present paradox of ethics; if I am absorbed in treating a few chosen persons as absolute ends ... if I am bent upon fulfilling all my duties towards them, I shall spend my life doing so; I shall be led to *pass over in silence* the injustices of the age ... and finally to *take advantage of oppression in order to do good*."¹⁷ Thus if I focus on respecting the freedom of particular people, I will find myself ignoring the oppression of others and will even support oppression if it benefits those I care about. In that case, "[t]he good that I try to do ... will be turned into radical evil. But, vice versa, if I throw myself into the revolutionary enterprise I risk having no more leisure for personal relations—worse still, of being led by the logic of the action into treating most men, and even my comrades, as means."¹⁸ If, then, I devote myself to fighting oppression, I risk treating those around me as means for the revolutionary cause. One might object that this paradox is not a problem, as a person can achieve a balance between the two extremes of caring for a few people while ignoring oppression and fighting oppression while ignoring those close to her, but this objection misses the force of Sartre's argument. Certainly the extremes of caring only for a few people and devoting oneself entirely to fighting oppression are not the only two possibilities, but the point is that no matter how hard one tries to find a mean between the two extremes, one will inevitably end up sacrificing the freedom of some people. More time caring for one's family and friends means less time fighting the oppression of others; more time spent fighting the oppression of others means less time caring for the people one actually knows. Thus no matter

how hard I try to find a mean between the extremes of caring only for a few people and devoting oneself entirely to fighting oppression, I will inevitably sacrifice the freedom of some people. It is therefore impossible to altogether avoid bad faith; one can only recognize that one chooses bad faith freely.

Limited Bad Faith as Essential to Authenticity

But this account does not suffice to show that the authentic person *must* be in bad faith, to a limited degree, precisely *in order* to be authentic. One might ask rather whether it is impossible to be authentic. To address this question, it is necessary to turn from Sartre's discussion of violence to his ontology. There is indeed an ontological reason for the inevitability of bad faith: namely, the attempt to avoid bad faith at all costs is itself bad faith, as such an attempt seeks to constitute authenticity as one's essence and thereby denies that the for-itself is a being "which is not what it is and which is what it is not."¹⁹ The for-itself is thus always authentic in the mode of not being authentic, so it cannot simply be authentic in the way that, for example, a table, which as an in-itself does have a fixed essence, is a table. Authenticity cannot be its essence, and seeking to constitute oneself as a being that is essentially authentic is just as much bad faith as is, for example, seeking to constitute oneself as a being that is essentially courageous. Sartre argues in the *Notebooks* that the authentic person "renounc[es] every project of being courageous (cowardly), noble (vile), etc."²⁰ In the same way, paradoxical as it may seem, the authentic person renounces the project of being authentic. As Sartre observes, "[i]f you seek authenticity for authenticity's sake, you are no longer authentic."²¹ Seeking "authenticity for authenticity's sake" is bad faith, for it turns authenticity into an abstraction. Because it is impossible to take on authenticity as the essence of one's being, one cannot be authentic in the abstract but can only live one's freedom with each concrete act. Describing authenticity, Sartre explains that "this

attitude ... only makes sense as a living solution, that is, on the plane of actual experience, of consciousness.”²² Authenticity cannot be detached from the particularity of existence. If I turn authenticity into a categorical moral law, I am not authentic, for authenticity is a project that I choose, not a moral law that tells me what to do. Declaring that I cannot perform a certain action because I am authentic pretends that authenticity is my essence and that authenticity therefore determines my actions and spares me the need to make choices for which I am responsible. Thus claiming that authenticity forbids me from using violence actually turns authenticity into bad faith, as such a claim allows me to pretend that I am not responsible for my choice to refrain from violence – and therefore that I am not responsible for whatever harm to the oppressed I implicitly accept by tolerating the oppressors. Some absolute “authenticity” that would be entirely free of bad faith is ontologically impossible, just as absolute courage is ontologically impossible.

Thus the answer to the question “Is it impossible to be authentic?” is that while no one is authentic in the sense that a table is a table, it is possible to be authentic in the mode of not being it – and such authenticity is compatible with a limited bad faith. This distinction between limited and unlimited bad faith is crucial. Unlimited bad faith occurs when a person does not take responsibility for her bad faith, and such bad faith is incompatible with authenticity. If, however, she does take responsibility for her bad faith, she limits it by that active acknowledgement of her responsibility for it, even though she cannot eliminate it. Thus if “to be” in that question means “to be in the mode of being,” the answer is that authenticity is impossible, but if it means “to be in the mode of not being,” the answer is that it is not impossible to be authentic, for one can be authentic in the same sense in which the for-itself ever is anything.²³ Indeed, being authentic in the way a table is a table *would not* be authenticity, precisely because authenticity is a concrete

project of the for-itself. A more complete answer to the question is, therefore, not only that it is entirely possible to be authentic in the mode of not being it, but also that whatever else we might be tempted to call authenticity simply *is not* authenticity. For the for-itself to have any fixed essence, “authentic” or otherwise, is impossible, but for the for-itself to act authentically in concrete situations is not impossible. Authentic acts are possible, just as courageous acts are. An authentic act arises out of a concern for others’ freedom, and moreover, the authentic attitude appears in a series of such acts. Even acts that involve bad faith can find their place within the authentic attitude and thus qualify as authentic acts provided first that the act in question is indeed driven by a concern for others’ freedom and second that the bad faith is limited. Moreover, these two points are connected, as not being concerned with others’ freedom is already bad faith. An authentic act can be an act of limited bad faith, but never an act of unlimited bad faith.

This emphasis on others’ freedom is crucial, as it permits a response to the authentic torturer problem, notably discussed by David Detmer,²⁴ which one might restate as the “torturer in limited bad faith problem”: given the preceding analysis, can a torturer who accepts his responsibility for his choice to torture others thereby limit his bad faith? Can anything at all – even the act of torturing or murdering an innocent person for fun – be an act of limited bad faith and therefore authentic? In short, while it may be impossible for anyone – even the person acting – to fully evaluate the authenticity of an act, one who tortures innocents is in no way meaningfully pursuing human freedom. Therefore, since by Sartre’s standards authenticity requires that one respect others’ freedom (as discussed above), such a torturer’s bad faith is unlimited. As authenticity is precisely not a categorical moral law, we cannot determine, independently of a given concrete situation, rules that tell us under exactly what circumstances

and to what degree violence is acceptable. We can know that simply not caring about human freedom is unlimited bad faith, and we can make more or less informed predictions about which courses of action are likely to advance the cause of freedom, but we cannot predetermine a set of acts that are inherently acts of limited bad faith and thus at least potentially authentic. It may be that in a hypothetical case in which torturing an oppressor would probably save many innocent lives, torture could be an act of limited bad faith; it may be that torture would still be an act of unlimited bad faith in that case; or it may be that this question is ultimately unanswerable. What is clear is that the authentic person pursues human freedom in concrete situations, and each individual for-itself is responsible for deciding how best to do so. And certainly one must not make such decisions lightly but must enter into them with an awareness of how very important human freedom is and how dangerously easy it is to convince oneself that some form of complicity in oppression, or active participation in it, is acceptable and even necessary. Failing to recognize that even violence that appears as necessary “will be the failure at the heart of the success” is, given Sartre’s analysis of the subject, an act of unlimited bad faith.²⁵

Here one might ask why, if one who is in limited bad faith must be working for human freedom, we should say that such a person is in bad faith at all. Can we not simply state that acts such as using necessary violence and otherwise accepting that one cannot protect everyone’s freedom all the time are authentic and conclude that no bad faith is involved? But such acts do in fact have the structure of bad faith as analyzed by Sartre, and we must face this reality. Recall Sartre’s statement that “[i]n violence one treats a freedom like a thing, all the while recognizing its nature as freedom.”²⁶ This contradiction appears in all acts of violence, even violence against oppressors – which in no way means that violence against oppressors is morally wrong. The revolutionary does treat the oppressor as a thing, as one who may as well not be free because her

liberty does not matter, while at the same time her use of violence against the oppressor is an acknowledgement that the oppressor is not a thing (no one, after all, rises up in revolution against tables).

This argument in no way means that the revolutionary's actions are sinful or otherwise worthy of moral criticism. In his analysis of Sartre's views of violence, Matt Eshleman notes that "we should not suppose that either acting or thinking in bad faith automatically undermines moral legitimacy in every case."²⁷ This point is entirely correct: although an analysis of particular historical situations is beyond the scope of this article, one can consistently maintain that violence is always bad faith *and* that people can be so oppressed that condemning their use of revolutionary violence is an even greater act of bad faith than the revolutionary violence. Sartre does state, as Eshleman rightly points out,²⁸ that "violence in this particular circumstance [slave revolts] is not distinguished from freedom. It is the only form freedom can take."²⁹ Yet violence is no less bad faith for being, at times, the only way to assume one's freedom at all: an absolute dichotomy between freedom and any form of bad faith here falls apart. In the same section of the *Notebooks*, Sartre goes on to assert that "violence is in fact unproductive. It realizes the liberation of abstract consciousness through the death of the individual."³⁰ There is ultimately a tension between freedom and any means of pursuing it that involves death (whether of the rebels or others, although it is the former that Sartre is referring to here). Freedom inevitably finds itself constrained to bad faith by concrete situations, and it does not follow that one cannot assume one's freedom; rather, assuming one's freedom means assuming one's responsibility for a limited bad faith. A freedom constrained to violence is a freedom constrained to bad faith: when violence is inevitable, limited bad faith becomes "the only form freedom can take." Unlimited bad faith is absolutely opposed to freedom, but limited bad faith is not. The for-

itself always lives in the tension created by the impossibility of preserving the freedom of all, and precisely because it is a for-itself, it can never respond to that tension with a pure “authenticity.”

It is crucial to emphasize that any claim that the rebel *should* be perfectly authentic, even though that is impossible, would miss the point: recall again that “authenticity” and “bad faith” are not terms given to us by a categorical moral law that commands the former and forbids the latter. We should therefore not permit an entirely reasonable unwillingness to condemn all revolutionary activities prevent us from recognizing the inevitability of bad faith. To say, “This is an act of limited bad faith” is not to say, “This is an immoral act,” and still less is it to condemn as wicked either the act itself or the one who performs it. Rather, it is to affirm that the person acting exists within a particular concrete situation in a world that is far from ideal and, crucially, that this person’s ultimate goal is freedom and that she takes full responsibility for her choice to act in a way that, although directed towards freedom, is also in some way contrary to that goal.

Necessity, Responsibility, and Freedom

One must understand that although bad faith is inevitable, it is the individual for-itself that chooses to constitute any particular situation as necessitating bad faith. Attempting to justify my failure to respect others’ freedom by arguing that it was necessary to use violence would be an act of unlimited bad faith, for such a claim would represent a complete failure to recognize my responsibility for my actions. If, however, I insisted that my freedom allowed me to always respect everyone else’s freedom, I would again be guilty of unlimited bad faith, for I would be denying that I am in a particular situation that renders certain actions impossible. Thus I can neither pretend to be able to avoid bad faith altogether nor justify an instance of bad faith on the

grounds of necessity. Claiming that an instance of bad faith was necessary and hence justified denies that I am free (that is, it denies my transcendence), and claiming to be able to entirely avoid bad faith denies that I am in situation (that is, it denies my facticity). Sartre defines facticity as “what causes the for-itself, while choosing the meaning of its situation and while constituting itself as the foundation of itself in situation, *not to choose* its position.”³¹ Therefore, although I choose when it is necessary to use violence and hence to be in bad faith, because of my facticity, I must acknowledge that I am in a position in which bad faith is unavoidable. Only if I recognize that I am the one who decides when a situation renders violence necessary can I avoid the trap of seeking to justify my bad faith on the grounds of necessity. As Sartre explains, “[t]he for-itself ... discovers the state of things which surrounds it as the cause for a reaction of defense or attack. But it can make this discovery only because it freely posits the end in relation to which the state of things is threatening or favorable.”³² If I conclude that it is necessary to use violence, that is because I have chosen a particular goal, the means I think will best lead to that goal, and a standard by which to decide how well a particular means leads to that goal. Violence in the abstract is inevitable, but in any particular situation, a person who chooses to use violence is choosing the meaning of that situation such that she considers violence an acceptable response and such that she values the results she (rightly or wrongly) believes violence will obtain more than those she believes nonviolence will obtain. Thus while I cannot pretend that it is never necessary to use violence, I choose when it is necessary, and I am responsible for that choice. And at the same time, if I strive for an unattainable, “pure” authenticity, categorically refusing to accept any degree of bad faith, I thereby fail to be authentic and am in bad faith.

One might object that there are particular situations such that the only two options are using violence or renouncing one’s pursuit of freedom, so there are specific cases in which the

for-itself truly does have no choice but to use violence.³³ But if the for-itself concludes that it has no choice, that is still because the for-itself has constituted the situation as one in which the use of violence and the renunciation of the pursuit of freedom are the only two choices. Perhaps any for-itself that does not so constitute the situation is necessarily in unlimited bad faith; let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that this is so. Yet the for-itself remains absolutely responsible for its choice, and there is no moral law that could justify it. Perhaps there is only one authentic choice, but authenticity is not a moral law, and claiming that authenticity forced me to choose violence amounts to pretending that it is a categorical moral law and thereby denying that it is my project. It is bad faith to deny facticity, but it is also bad faith to pretend that facticity could ever annul responsibility. Again, it in no way follows that we should condemn those who use violence in such a situation. Nothing in my analysis should be taken as an excuse to pass judgment on people in situations that cannot truly be imagined without being endured. To say that anyone who uses violence is in limited bad faith is not to make a moral judgment.

Let us turn to a concrete example to clarify this argument. Consider Sartre's story of his student who "ha[s] the choice of going to England to join the Free French Forces – which would mean abandoning his mother – or remaining by her side to help her go on with her life."³⁴ The student faces a genuine dilemma because both choices appear inconsistent with authenticity: the latter option disregards the freedom of his oppressed countrymen, but the former disregards his mother's freedom. Only if authenticity were a categorical moral law commanding "Always respect the freedom of others," however, would the student be doomed to inauthenticity. He can choose authentically if he recognizes his total responsibility for his choice, and a key component of that recognition is the realization that whatever his choice, he is choosing to violate someone's freedom. If he tells himself that he has made his choice and that he is responsible for it but that it

has no real effect on anyone's freedom, he is entirely in bad faith because, although he claims to accept his responsibility for his choice, he refuses to accept that his choice has consequences for which he is responsible. And if he used the impossibility of not violating anyone's freedom as an excuse to not care about freedom, or if he said that his violation of someone's freedom was morally justified because it was necessary, he would again be entirely in bad faith. By considering his choice so trivial that it does not matter that he is responsible for it, by concluding that freedom does not matter because the freedom of all cannot be fully preserved, or by concluding that necessity justified his choice, he would be hiding from his responsibility. But because he can fully accept his responsibility for his choice, acknowledging that he chose to violate someone's freedom and that there is no moral law in accordance with which the choice could be either justifiable or unjustifiable, he can limit his bad faith and remain authentic.

One might here protest that just as the impossibility of being courageous in the sense in which a chair is a chair does not render cowardly actions necessary, the impossibility of being authentic in that sense does not render acts of bad faith necessary. The difference between the two cases, however, is that it is comparatively unlikely that a person will be in a situation in which it is *necessary* for her to perform a cowardly action, no matter what she does (unless one maintains that any act of limited bad faith is in some way cowardly). It would certainly be bad faith to claim that because I am courageous, I simply *cannot* perform cowardly actions, but it is relatively likely that a person will always be able to choose to avoid cowardly actions, whereas the concrete situations in which human beings find themselves render it impossible to always avoid bad faith. Thus bad faith is inevitable in a way cowardice is not, and refusing to acknowledge the inevitability of bad faith is itself a bad-faith denial of facticity. Asking whether it would be possible to entirely avoid bad faith in a perfect world is pointless, for I do not live in

such a world; my actual situation is such that I cannot entirely avoid bad faith, and as I have no preexisting essence, I am inseparable from the actual situations that make up my lived existence. It would be wrong, then, to assert that although I cannot in fact avoid violence, I could in theory be perfectly authentic (that is, never be in bad faith), for such a claim would assume that I did have a preexisting essence that was compatible with the total avoidance of bad faith. Ultimately, we cannot separate the practical and ontological reasons for the impossibility of avoiding bad faith: the being of the for-itself is such that it exists in concrete situations and has no transcendent, pre-established essence, and that concrete existence is incompatible with the total avoidance of bad faith. In *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Sartre points out that it is senseless to speak of a tragedy Racine could have written but did not,³⁵ and it is equally senseless to speak of my entirely avoiding bad faith in a world that is not the one I live in.

In conclusion, if I perform an act of violence, fully acknowledging that I am responsible for my choice, that I chose the end which I seek to attain by that means, and that I decided that violence was the best way to attain that end, I recognize my responsibility for my bad faith instead of hiding from it. Thus I recognize my responsibility for this choice, thereby limiting the bad faith inherent in that choice. Such a limited bad faith is not only consistent with authenticity but is necessary to it, and this claim does not undermine Sartre's ethic, for authenticity is not an attempt to avoid bad faith at all costs but rather is a project in which one always recognizes one's complete responsibility for one's choices. The refusal of a limited bad faith is in fact unlimited bad faith, for by such a refusal, one attempts to constitute oneself as essentially authentic, which is impossible. By implicitly accepting that authenticity involves a limited bad faith, Sartre preserves authenticity as a lived project, and not a categorical moral law, and he preserves both the facticity and the transcendence of the for-itself. And harsh as the argument presented here

may seem, it should reaffirm our commitment to freedom by reminding us that it is futile to sit back and wait to discover some perfect course of action, untainted by bad faith; rather, we must act even amid the sheer messiness of the world.

Notes

¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1992), 79. Hereafter cited as *BN*. *L'Être et le néant* (Paris, Gallimard, 1976), 115.

Hereafter cited as *EN*.

² Jean-Paul Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), 474. Hereafter cited as *NE*. *Cahiers pour une morale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), 490. Hereafter cited as *CPM*.

³ *BN*, 98. *EN*, 91.

⁴ See Sartre's statement that "the ambiguity necessary for bad faith comes from the fact that I affirm here that I *am* my transcendence in the mode of being of a thing. It is only thus, in fact, that I can feel that I escape all reproaches." *BN*, 99. *EN*, 92.

⁵ See Sartre's analysis of sincerity in *BN*, 109-112. *EN*, 100-102.

⁶ *BN*, 116. *EN*, 106. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out the need to discuss these footnotes.

⁷ *BN*, 534. *EN*, 453.

⁸ *NE*, 474. *CPM*, 490.

⁹ *NE*, 193. *CPM*, 202.

¹⁰ *NE*, 325. *CPM* 338.

¹¹ Regarding bad faith as a flight from the freedom of the for-itself, see Sartre's assertion that "[t]he being that forms the object of desire of the for-itself is then an in-itself which would be to itself its own foundation [...]" (*BN*, 723. *EN*, 611). The rejection of one's own freedom is central to bad faith as Sartre understands it, and I follow Sartre's understanding of bad faith even as I draw out from his arguments a conclusion (that limited bad faith is necessary to authenticity) that he never makes explicit.

¹² See, for example, Ronald E. Santoni, *Sartre on Violence: Curiously Ambivalent* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), Santoni, "The Bad Faith of Violence – and is Sartre in Bad Faith Regarding It?" *Sartre Studies International* 11, nos. 1 and 2 (Jan. 2005): 62-77, and Santoni, "Concerning the Ambivalence of Sartre on Violence: A Commentary/Rejoinder", *Sartre Studies International* 19, no. 2 (Dec. 2013): 112-128, as well as (for a different perspective) Ian Birchall, "Sartre on Terror," *Sartre Studies International* 11, nos. 1 and 2 (Jan. 2005): 251-264, Marguerite La Caze, "Sartre Integrating Ethics and Politics: The Case of Terrorism," *Parrhesia* 3 (2007): 43-54, and Michael Fleming, "Sartre on Violence: Not So Ambivalent?" *Sartre Studies International* 17, no. 1 (Mar. 2011): 20-40. Still more recently, see Matthew C. Eshleman and Ronald E. Santoni, "Is Violence Necessarily in Bad Faith?: Liberatory Violence, Bad Faith, and Moral Justification: A Reply," *Sartre Studies International*, 22, no. 2 (Dec. 2015): 59-84. But even Santoni's statement (in an article that considers Sartre's later works as well as the *Notebooks*) that "Sartre's selective justification of violence does seem clearly to imply a selective acceptance and justification of the bad faith of violence" (Santoni, "The Bad Faith of Violence – and is Sartre in Bad Faith Regarding It?", 72) does not go so far as to assert – as I do here – that the authentic person is *necessarily* in bad faith to a certain degree and indeed would cease to be authentic if she did not accept a limited bad faith.

¹³ Santoni, “The Bad Faith of Violence – and is Sartre in Bad Faith Regarding It?”, 72.

¹⁴ *CPM*, 211. My translation. *NE* 202.

¹⁵ *NE*, 201. *CPM*, 209.

¹⁶ *CPM*, 215-216. My translation. *NE*, 207.

¹⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, “*What is Literature?*” and *Other Essays*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 221. Hereafter cited as *WL*. “Qu’est-ce que la littérature” in *Situations, II: Qu’est-ce que la littérature?* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948), 296. Hereafter cited as *QL*.

¹⁸ *WL*, 222. Translation modified. *QL*, 297.

¹⁹ *BN*, 79. *EN*, 115.

²⁰ *NE*, 475. *CPM*, 491.

²¹ *NE*, 4. *CPM*, 12.

²² *NE*, 468. Translation modified. *CPM*, 484.

²³ Note also that Sartre does not treat authenticity as categorically impossible: if authenticity “only makes sense as a living solution” (*NE*, 468, trans. modified; *CPM*, 484), this implies that it can be such a “living solution” and hence that it is possible to live authentically in concrete experience.

²⁴ David Detmer, *Freedom as a Value: A Critique of the Ethical Theory of Jean-Paul Sartre* (Chicago: Open Court, 1986), 165-166.

²⁵ *CPM*, 216. My translation. *NE*, 207.

²⁶ *NE*, 193. *CPM*, 202.

²⁷ Eshleman and Santoni, “Is Violence Necessarily in Bad Faith?; Liberatory Violence, Bad Faith, and Moral Justification: A Reply,” 64. In his reply, Santoni emphasizes – as I do here –

that observing that an act is in bad faith is not the same as claiming that the act is wrong: “for A to be ‘less immoral’ does not rid it of the bad faith characterized by objectification and by choosing not to see all the evidence regarding the brutality of counter-violence and terror.”

(Ibid., 80.)

²⁸ Ibid., 65.

²⁹ *NE*, 404. *CPM*, 418.

³⁰ *NE*, 405. *CPM*, 420.

³¹ *BN*, 83. *EN*, 119.

³² *BN*, 487-488. *EN*, 533.

³³ I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for raising this possible objection.

³⁴ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, trans. Carol Macomber (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 30. *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme* (Paris: Les Éditions Nagel, 1968), 40.

³⁵ Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, 37. *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme*, 57.