Thesis written by
Angel Marie Cooper
B.S., Bridgewater State University, 2010
M.A., Kent State University, 2012

Approved by

Dr. Michael Byron, Advisor
Dr. David Odell-Scott, Chair, Department of Philosophy
Dr. John R. D. Stalvey, Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Michael Byron, for being encouraging, supportive, and for spending his time and effort working with me on this thesis. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Deborah Barnbaum, Dr. David Odell-Scott, and Dr. Maryann DeJulio, for their support and comments.
INTRODUCTION

Existentialism seems like the antithesis to an ethics of any kind, so proving an existential virtue ethics may be regarded as an impossible task. However, I think this interpretation of existentialism disregards a lot of important ideas that existentialists have about the individual and society. I agree that it is difficult to find a coherent ethics in many existentialist works, but I think that a workable ethics can be maintained from existential notions.

When I first became involved with existentialism, I thought that many existentialists, such as Nietzsche or Camus, provide a useful and inspiring attitude towards life. I thought living in this way can be excellent for people. But soon after I had this recognition, I wondered how these philosophers’s existentialism can work with other people. That is, if life is meaningless, there are no inherent or absolute truths, and we can create ourselves in any way, how do we maintain an ethics? How can we ground an ethic on, for instance, Nietzsche’s perspectivism, or Sartre’s subjectivism, or Camus’s absurdism? I think, when we consider existentialism in these terms, an ethics certainly seems impossible. However, if we look at some of what these existentialists say about the human being, virtue ethics has the closest connection to existentialism.

Deontology does not cohere with these existentialists, because for these existentialists there are no absolutes, life is meaningless, we all have individual perspectives of the world. There is no ground in these notions to hold that human beings have a duty to anyone or anything. If the world is meaningless and we can create ourselves in any way, it’s inconsistent to argue that
there is some obligation we all have to which we must conform. Likewise, consequentialism does not cohere with existentialism because these existentialists are less focused on the consequences of the actions we commit and more on who we are as individuals. Virtue ethics, on the other hand, is about the individual, the individual’s character, and a way of being. Virtue ethics has the starting point that we need to develop an existential ethics. Virtue ethicists asks, what kind of person should I be, or who should I be? Existentialism comes from the same vein. Existentialists likewise ask, who should I be, or who do I want to be? It is not an ethical question, but it is a question about how I should create myself. It’s about the kind of individual I want to become. How do I want to develop my character? Neither existentialism nor virtue ethics prioritizes what actions I should perform or duties I need to follow above the character I need to develop. Both consider the kind of character I want to create for myself. Who you are and what you can make of yourself is important in both. Furthermore, virtue ethics defines certain virtues of character that I need to develop to be a good human being. If any ethics will fit with existentialism, it will have to be one that places importance on what we need to develop of our character to be the kind of person we want to be.

Robert Solomon argues that Nietzsche has a virtue ethic in *Living with Nietzsche*. John J. Davenport argues that an existential virtue ethics can be created from Kierkegaard’s existential philosophy and Macintyre’s ethics. I will argue that it is possible to ground an existential virtue ethic similar to MacIntyre’s or Aristotle’s with a Sartrean style existential philosophy. To do this, I ask first, what we do need for a virtue ethics, and second, can Sartre’s philosophy provide that? To ground a virtue ethic, we need a *telos*, a kind of philosophy that promotes the character of the individual, and a philosophy that can provide some virtues to develop that character. In this thesis, I use David Detmer’s interpretation of Sartre to demonstrate what kind of *telos* a Sartrean
virtue ethics would have. Detmer argues that freedom is the highest value according to Sartre. Freedom is what we are for Sartre. We would not be human beings if we did not have freedom. Everything we do involves our free choice. Everything that Sartre describes in *Being and Nothingness* derives from our freedom. Thus, I argue freedom is the human telos for a Sartrean virtue ethics. If we use Detmer’s interpretation of Sartre’s philosophy, we can hold consistently that freedom is the telos of a Sartrean virtue ethics.

Sartre’s philosophy in *Being and Nothingness* is already concerned with the character of the individual. He discusses the projects, values, and relationships of the individual. He discusses how things in the world affect the individual, and how the individual exists in the world with others. *Being and Nothingness* describes how free individuals create lives for themselves while already thrown into a society.

Lastly, Sartre presents virtues in *Being and Nothingness* although he does not call them virtues. He describes valuable character traits that we acquire by accepting and recognizing our freedom. Bad faith is a problem according to Sartre because it involves our lying to ourselves about our freedom. Sartre’s discussion of bad faith also suggests integrity of the individual. Sartre argues that we are in bad faith when we try to think of ourselves as simply facticity or simply transcendence, when the fact that we are free means we are both facticity and transcendence all the time. In other words, if we do not accept our freedom and combine the different aspects of ourselves (e.g. facticity and transcendence), we will be in bad faith. He also argues that we have a hierarchy of ends and that we are a totality. In order to realize our values, we need integrity. To be an authentic individual, we need the virtue of honesty. The virtue of creativity is important because we need creativity to create who we are, our values, rules, etc. The more creative we are the better characters we can create for ourselves.
Therefore, this thesis is a prolegomena to an existential virtue ethics. I maintain that it is possible to ground an existential virtue ethics using Sartre’s existential notions in *Being and Nothingness*. This thesis is an attempt to suggest that an existential virtue ethics is possible. I am not creating an existential virtue ethics. I want to show that the two are not incompatible and that they can cohere. I argue that Detmer’s interpretation of Sartre’s philosophy makes it possible to ground an existential virtue ethics with Sartre’s philosophy. That is, Sartre’s existential philosophy can be used to create a virtue ethics that will not be inconsistent with either existentialism or a general notion of virtue ethics.

Furthermore, I use Davenport’s approach to an existential virtue ethics to employ my argument. More specifically, Davenport claims that a Kierkegaardian virtue ethics will not be a eudaimonistic ethics, but a postmodern ethics. A Kierkegaardian virtue ethics does not have a metaphysical foundation like a eudaimonistic ethics. Our *telos* does come from our nature, but this ethics is an ethics of autonomy. It doesn’t tell you a substantive end that is what is to be human, or a specific action we must perform. The Kierkegaardian *telos* is authenticity, which tells us how to create a character, but not what character to create. Similarly, I argue that a Sartrean virtue ethics will not be eudaimonistic, but postmodern. The *telos* of freedom also tells us how to create our character, but not what character to create.

In chapter one, I will first discuss Davenport’s essay “Towards an Existential Virtue Ethics: Kierkegaard and MacIntyre.” This essay provides reasons to support the coherence of an existential virtue ethics as well as demonstrate how a theory of existentialism can work with a theory of virtue ethics. I will follow the argument of this essay to argue that Sartre’s existentialism can also cohere with a virtue ethics. Here, Davenport argues that Kierkegaard’s philosophy can cohere with and improve MacIntyre’s virtue ethics. Davenport first describes
reasons for which we usually hold that existentialism and virtue ethics are opposed philosophies. He then claims that if we look into political history, we can see that existentialism and virtue ethics arise from similar problems in political society. Next, Davenport argues that a Kierkegaardian telos is authenticity, and describes how this telos is unlike eudaimonia, but can fit consistently with a virtue ethics. Finally, Davenport argues that Kierkegaard’s philosophy can help MacIntyre’s and MacIntyre’s philosophy can help demonstrate Kierkegaard’s notion of authenticity. He holds that Kierkegaard’s existentialism can help create a richer and more fulfilling virtue ethics with his notions of freedom, dispositional character, and earnestness.

In chapter two, I discuss Sartre’s notions of freedom, end projects that we choose for our lives, and values. These are central notions to Sartre’s philosophy in Being and Nothingness that will form a Sartrean existential virtue ethics. Freedom is what it is to be human. It is the nihilating ability of our consciousness, along with the ability to place value on what is nihilated, make a choice based on this value, and act in a way to make that choice a reality. Detmer claims that there are two kinds of freedom at play in Sartre’s philosophy: ontological freedom and practical freedom. Ontological freedom is our absolute freedom. It is our ability to choose. Practical freedom is limited. It is our ability to obtain our choices. Our end projects are projects that come from our substantive values. These projects form who we are. Sartre describes values as subjective goods we create in the world.

In chapter three, I will explain that we may acknowledge a problem that arises from Sartre’s subjectivism. That is, if all values are subjective, how can Sartre consistently provide a telos that will guide our creation of values? I present Detmer’s argument that Sartre has two aspects of his subjectivism: the subjectivity of values and the subjectivity of value judgments. Detmer holds that Sartre thinks that the subjectivity of values implies the subjectivity of value
judgments, but this is incorrect. Furthermore, Sartre also has objectivist claims in his philosophy, and if we accept these claims, then we can consistently hold that freedom is the highest value for Sartre. Next, Detmer argues that Sartre often expresses the notion that freedom is the highest value for humanity. He explains that the freedom Sartre expresses here is practical freedom, which is the freedom to obtain. Thus, Sartre’s ethical philosophy will hold that we should increase our practical freedom as much as possible. I argue that if we accept Demter’s interpretation, then freedom will be the Sartrean human telos for a Sartrean virtue ethics. Freedom as the human telos means that we promote practical freedom for all human beings. However, I argue that the promotion of practical freedom is also related to a recognition and acceptance of ontological freedom because the two are entwined. Finally, I present four examples of fundamental virtues that will come from a Sartrean virtue ethic: benevolence, creativity, honesty, and integrity. These four virtues, if acquired, will help human beings promote freedom, which is the Sartrean telos.
Chapter 1

In *Towards an Existential Virtue Ethics: Kierkegaard and MacIntyre*, John J. Davenport provides the foundation for an existential virtue ethics between Kierkegaard and MacIntyre. His arguments are important insofar as they are a starting off point for what I will attempt later in this thesis. I will argue that Sartre’s philosophy in *Being and Nothingness* can also ground an existential virtue ethics. Davenport argues that it is a mistake to hold that existentialism and virtue ethics are incompatible theories. He shows how existentialism can ground a theory of virtue ethics. He also claims that a different notion of the human telos other than a substantive Aristotelian telos is possible through Kierkegaard’s existentialism. Finally, he argues that existentialism can bring something to virtue ethics which the theory doesn’t already have. Specifically Kierkegaard’s existentialism can bring a willing earnestness and freedom of disposition. I will describe the important aspects of Davenport’s essay in order to show that an existential virtue ethics is possible and how it can be grounded. Later I will attempt to ground an existential virtue ethics using Sartre’s philosophy in a similar way.

First, Davenport presents two arguments for why existentialism and virtue ethics are generally thought to be incompatible theories and argues that it is not the case that these theories are incompatible. After arguing for the possibility of an existential virtue ethics, he gives five relations between Kierkegaard’s philosophy and virtue ethics. Next, Davenport argues that Kierkegaard’s theories of freedom, dispositional character, and earnestness can ground a virtue ethics. Finally, Davenport argues that MacIntyre needs Kierkegaard for his virtue ethics and also
that Kierkegaard needs MacIntyre Davenport presents and criticizes two arguments for why existentialism and virtue ethics appear incompatible. First, Davenport explains, “The most simplistic gloss is that virtue ethics views moral character as a matter of habit or disposition, without any concern for freedom.”

Aristotle for example, argues that we become virtuous by acquiring certain habits or dispositions to act in the right way. Acting in the right way means in accordance with reason. Thus, we should live according to reason, which will involve acquiring certain virtues including virtue of character. We acquire these virtues by habit. However, Aristotle doesn’t address human freedom in his account. In other words, he doesn’t regard human beings as free, and as such may not have a nature. Human beings may not have a particular function that determines what we need to do in order to flourish. Davenport argues that a gloss placed on existentialism is that “existentialism puts all the emphasis on a freedom so absolute that stable character becomes inconceivable.” Following this idea of freedom, we are totally free and nothing determines the actions we perform or draws us to certain choices. If this is the notion of freedom we hold, there is nothing to urge us to choose one action over another. Thus, our choice seems to become random and meaningless.

Second, virtue ethics allegedly suppresses individuality and focuses on social relationships, whereas existentialism appears to promote individuality and not give social relationships much meaning at all. Davenport explains, “Virtue ethics seems to subordinate all interior individuality or self-relation to social relations that ultimately determine our self interpretations.” That is, virtue ethics seems to maintain that the self is constructed more from

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2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.


5 Davenport, 266.

6 Ibid., 269.

7 Ibid., 267.

8 Ibid., 268.

9 Ibid., 271, original emphasis.

10 Davenport argues that Kierkegaard and MacIntyre’s third point of agreement is that neither is a
social relations than from any individuality. For instance, in *After Virtue*, MacIntyre argues that we think of justice in terms of what we deserve. However, theories of justice that focus on the individual as primary, such as Rawls’s and Nozick’s, do not address this idea of desert. Furthermore, we cannot think of the individual as primary and the society as subordinate if we accept this concept of desert. He explains:

Individuals are thus in both accounts primary and society secondary, and the identification of individual interests is prior to, and independent of, the construction of any moral or social bonds between them. But we have already seen that the notion of desert is at home only in the context of a community whose primary bond is a shared understanding both of the good for man and of the good of that community and where individuals identify their primary interests with reference to those goods.  

We are too focused on ourselves as individuals. When we think of being good or doing right actions, we think of it in terms of the individual. This causes conflict with our understanding of justice as desert. If, however, we think in terms of the good of a community, humanity will be unified, and the problem of desert looks radically different. MacIntyre criticizes the focus on the individual in determining virtue and recommends a focus on the community for determining virtue. Nietzsche and Kierkegaard on the other hand, are well known for criticizing living for the community, calling unified people the crowd or sheep. Nietzsche especially praises the idea of living for oneself and creating and determining one’s own virtues.

Davenport explains this difference further when he writes, “While virtue ethics regards each person’s life as simply one part of a social whole, existentialism supposedly makes them

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into a self generating interpersonal consciousness.”\(^5\) That is, it seems as though for virtue ethics, who we are is determined by the part we play in society. Our character is formed by the society we live in. However, in existentialism it seems as though we somehow create an individual character from nothing external. We internally produce our own unique character.

Davenport explains that existentialism and virtue ethics are not as incompatible as they seem to be. Both, he claims, are reactions to social and political attitudes of their time. He writes, “[B]oth rejected the libertarian ideology of prepolitical natural rights and its illusion of atomic, unencumbered, or nonsituated selves.”\(^6\) Existentialism is a reaction to totalitarian political ideologies and emphasizes freedom.\(^7\) MacIntyre’s virtue ethics is a reaction both to a freedom that is simply “a lack of regulation of individual behavior, and forms of collectivist control designed only to limit the anarchy of self-interest.”\(^8\) Davenport argues that existentialists also reject these ideas of freedom and control. Thus, Davenport maintains, since both existentialism and virtue ethics respond to similar social and political ideologies of their time, they can be interwoven. He then argues that Kierkegaard’s existentialism has similarities to virtue ethics and thus further claims that existentialism and virtue ethics are compatible theories.

Davenport defines five areas of agreement between Kierkegaard and MacIntyre. First, he explains that like Aristotle, “Kierkegaard also takes motivational character and the direction of one’s whole life, rather than particular types of action, to be the primary subjects of ethics.”\(^9\) That is, when dealing with ethics it is important that we consider a person’s inner character and the goals of a person’s entire life when evaluating their actions. We cannot simply assess the actions separately from their character and goals. Kierkegaard is not a consequentialist. For

\(^5\) Davenport, 266.
\(^6\) Ibid., 269.
\(^7\) Ibid., 267.
\(^8\) Ibid., 268.
\(^9\) Ibid., 271, original emphasis.
Kierkegaard, the consequences of our actions alone do not determine if we are moral or immoral. He holds a teleological view of ethics. What determines the morality of actions is the character of the agent. We have moral characters based on whether we live authentically, according to Kierkegaard. Our actions considered in isolation do not determine our moral worth, so we should not consider only our actions when determining how to be ethical. Instead, we should look at our overall character because an authentic character tells whether a person is moral or immoral. Furthermore, Davenport explains that Kierkegaard focuses on what he calls “proto-virtues” in his ethics. Proto-virtues are needed to gain “substantive moral virtues.” Davenport uses the example of courage as one of Kierkegaard’s proto-virtues. Being courageous allows us to develop moral maturity because it teaches us to overcome challenges and stay committed to our goals. Proto-virtues create an understanding of what is “noble” or “base,” and such an understanding creates our moral character.

Davenport’s first area of agreement between Kierkegaard and MacIntyre leads to his second. The proto virtues provide an understanding of the distinction between strong contrasts, such as noble/base. Kierkegaard’s and MacIntyre’s second agreement is that being ethical involves having a “life of narrative unity.” Davenport explains, “To be in the ethical life-stage or existential ‘sphere’ for Kierkegaard is to be disposed to interpret one’s actions, motives, and

10 Davenport argues that Kierkegaard and MacIntyre’s third point of agreement is that neither is a consequentialist and that both maintain a teleological viewpoint of ethics. I will give a more detailed explanation of why Davenport holds that Kierkegaard is not a consequentialist and that he has a teleology based on one’s authenticity in Kierkegaard’s and MacIntyre’s third point of agreement.
11 Ibid., 271.
12 Ibid.
13 Proto virtues are different from substantive virtues because they concern character traits in a variety of contexts. That is, they encompass substantive virtues. Examples of proto-virtues are earnestness and courage. Earnestness is a kind of moral seriousness or caring. Caring about choices is something that encompasses all moral decisions and thus all virtues. Furthermore, courage is a kind of perseverance. We should have perseverance in moral situations. Perseverance also encompasses all virtues.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
interests in terms of an ethical language of “strong contrasts.”\textsuperscript{16,17} Thus, to be ethical according to Kierkegaard is to have a life that has a specific goal which leads us to make certain choices. These choices then, will direct us towards our goal. A life unified by this process is one that has narrative unity.

The third agreement between MacIntyre and Kierkegaard is that Kierkegaard, like MacIntyre is not a consequentialist. In consequentialism, actions are considered right or wrong depending solely on the value of their consequences. Motive and character are morally irrelevant in assessing right and wrong action. Kierkegaard does not accept this notion of right and wrong. Kierkegaard maintains a teleological view of ethics, but not a consequentialist view. That is, right and wrong actions are assessed relative to the attainment of a goal, but the character we have will determine whether or not we can attain our goal. We can aim at a narrow goal in which case right and wrong are determined by the consequences. However, we can also aim at broader goals such as acquiring a certain kind of character. Here, consequences are not taken into account because in this goal we are not looking for the consequences of some action but what kinds of habits and motivations we can acquire.

Furthermore, Davenport holds that although Kierkegaard does write in the ethical stage that values can be obligatory for all people, he does not mean that our obligations are “impersonal in content.”\textsuperscript{18} For Kierkegaard obligation has more to do with the individual than the act. The duties we have come from our “innermost being.”\textsuperscript{19} We may express a universal value but we do so through a particular life and in a particular way. Our innermost being is our

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., original emphasis.
\textsuperscript{17} Davenport uses the term strong contrasts, which is opposed to weak contrasts. Strong contrasts are terms that provide more detail and offer a significant descriptive component. An example of strong contrasts is brave and cowardly. These terms tell us something more specific about the moral agent. Weak contrasts on the other hand, are terms that are less descriptive and more general in nature. An example of weak contrasts is right and wrong. These are more general terms that do not provide much detail about the moral agent.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 272. Original emphasis
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, 272-3.
individual and particular character. Davenport presents neighbor love as an example of 
expression of a universal value through our inner most being. Neighbor love is a universal value 
according to Kierkegaard. It is a universal value that we should love other human beings.
However, this value is expressed through our character and in a particular way in each 
individual. That is, although it is a universal value for me to love other human beings, I love 
other human beings in my own particular way because of the character I have. For instance, the 
way I express my love for my friends is different from how another person, Joan, expresses her 
love towards her friends. Joan is an extroverted person, for example. Joan may call a friend, Bill, 
who is in a problematic situation daily to see how he is doing and offer help. I, on other hand, am 
an introverted person. I may not call Bill in order to give him space and allow him to call me 
when he needs a friend. Both Joan and I express love for our friend, but depending on our 
character, we express it in different ways. Davenport argues that MacIntyre’s virtue ethics 
accepts this idea of value as well.

Fourth, Kierkegaard also accepts that there are character traits and that we learn these 
through “habits, evaluative attitudes, and sentiments whose initial shapes are formed in 
childhood.”20 Furthermore, because Kierkegaard accepts that we learn character traits through 
habits, evaluative attitudes, and sentiments, he also accepts that to understand ethics we must 
also understand “moral psychology, philosophical anthropology, and metaphysics.”21 That is, we 
learn about what habits, evaluative attitudes, and sentiments are and why we have them by 
approaching them from these disciplines. Thus, to understand these things in an ethical context, 
we need to study them from these disciplines. MacIntyre also shares this view

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21 Ibid.
The fifth and final agreement is that Kierkegaard maintains, “Virtues are qualities of character connected to the attainment of beatitude as the final end and highest good of human life.” Davenport explains that although Kierkegaard does not understand the human telos as all inclusive, his notion of the human telos still coheres with virtue ethics. Following Kierkegaard, we a have a telos that is derived from our nature, but this telos is not a substantive all encompassing good as it is with Aristotle. For Aristotle and MacIntyre the telos is all encompassing and comprehensive in the sense that it includes all the major types of good in a life. However, for Kierkegaard it is not comprehensive in this way. Instead, Kierkegaard holds that our goal in being ethical is authenticity of the will. If we live lives that are authentic and make choices earnestly, we will have good characters. Kierkegaard focuses on character and how a person chooses, rather than on a substantive goal that will encompass all the goods in life. Furthermore, our telos is not “a complete metaphysical foundation for ethics” as it is with Aristotle and MacIntyre. For Aristotle and MacIntyre, good is what works for its purpose. Human beings are rational animals, so what is good for us is using reason well. Through this metaphysical foundation, Aristotle can determine what flourishing is for the human being and what virtues are. Davenport holds, “for Kierkegaard ethics has no pre-ethical metaphysical foundation in any teleological essence.” That is, we have no metaphysical essence of what it is to be human that can lead us to our teleology. Our teleology here is authenticity, and authenticity is already in the realm of ethics. There is no metaphysical foundation outside of the ethical sphere to ground authenticity as the telos.

22 Ibid.
23 Davenport defines eudaimonistic as theories which “(1) propose a metaphysical foundation for virtue ethics, defining virtues as qualities of character that promote the attainment of the human telos and vices as qualities of character that impede its attainment, and (2) conceive the human telos as happiness in a holistic sense embracing all that is desirable in human life” (Davenport, 274).
24 Ibid., 274.
25 Ibid., 275.
Davenport argues that we have two versions of a telos according to Kierkegaard, one in two stages of existence. In the ethical stage our telos is “authenticity of will,” but this telos does not “ground the authority of ethics.” That is, there is no prior metaphysical claim for authenticity of the will. Kierkegaard discusses the individual who is already ethical. He does not need a metaphysical justification to do so. In the religious stage, our telos is “salvation in God,” but this telos also does not ground the authority of ethics. Davenport argues that salvation is a reward, not something that makes us ethical.

After describing similarities between Kierkegaard and MacIntyre, Davenport explains that Kierkegaard brings a willing earnestness and freedom of disposition to virtue ethics. Davenport claims that some virtue ethicists argue that virtues are “dispositions to behave in certain characteristic ways.” That is, we have a reliable tendency to act in certain ways which these philosophers would call virtuous, and this tendency to act in these ways constitutes a virtuous character. Davenport describes Aristotle as one virtue ethicist who has a more complex view of this claim. He argues that Aristotle’s ethics is based on the choices of virtuous people. For people to be virtuous, the acts they perform (which determine the character they have) must be acts they desire and choose. If they perform an act without thinking about it, simply out of habit, then this act is still considered a virtuous act because they chose to acquire that habit previously in their lives. They can also rationally explain why they performed this act if they are asked to reflect on it. Davenport points out that many other virtue ethicists, such as MacIntyre, agree with this claim as well. However, this leads to the problematic idea that “direct dispositions to right appetite and emotion, which do not require moral strength [or self-control]

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26 Ibid., 274.
27 Ibid.
28 Ibid., 276.
for their exemplification, can be virtues.” If we have the disposition to virtuous emotion, we do not need to gain it through moral strength. By gaining virtue through moral strength, Davenport means to actively choose a virtuous act in the moment, not out of habit, but because of one’s will. Thus, we only use moral strength when we are aware of our choice and choose it earnestly. Acting out of habit does not involve moral strength because we do not consider our act in the moment. Here, although we gain the disposition through consideration of virtue, we no longer consider virtue when we act. We just act out of habit. Davenport describes this idea further as he presents Kierkegaard’s notions of the will and earnestness.

Davenport holds that part of the problem with Aristotle’s and MacIntyre’s theory of virtue is that the will is ignored. In Kierkegaard’s philosophy, the will is important for having a virtuous character, as we can see with the proto-virtue earnestness. Kierkegaard argues that we must be earnest in our decisions and actions to have virtuous characters. Earnestness is different from mere disposition because, as Davenport explains, it is “taking to the heart” the choices we make. That is, when we are earnest in our decisions, we care deeply about the choices we make and we act on them because we care. Davenport explains that earnestness is a higher order disposition because it is a disposition about other dispositions. We have higher order dispositions (earnestness) about our other dispositions (to help people).

Disposition is an “intelligible action” for Davenport. We intentionally choose to act in a certain way, and we know we are choosing. Our act is not a mere habit. Although we may not think about why we act in this way at this time, if we reflect on our action, we can rationally explain why we performed it. However, in earnestness, our action is not only intelligible, but we

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30 Ibid., 277.
31 Ibid, 278.
deeply care about it. Earnestness unlike mere disposition can never become second nature. Since in earnestness we always care about our decision, even if a decision is repetitive, it always keeps its originality according to Davenport.\textsuperscript{32} For example, I am walking down the street and I see an old lady attempting to cross. I think about it and decide I should help this old lady. After that, every time I see an old lady trying to cross the street I help her. However, I have helped so many old ladies cross the street that it has become second nature to help them. Now, when I help an old lady cross, I am aware that I am doing so, but I just do it because that is what I have been doing for some time. If I reflect on helping the lady, I recognize that it is the right thing to do, but in the act, I am not thinking about it as the right thing to do. I just do it. This is a mere disposition. However, if each time I help the old lady, I really care about helping that particular lady, I am not just aware of the decision I made, but I really do care about this lady and helping her, then I am acting in earnestness. Each time I help an old lady cross the street, the act is an “original rededication” to the virtue because I care about my action.\textsuperscript{33}

Furthermore, Davenport argues that since we care in earnestness, “Earnest states of will are not \textit{mere} dispositions in the familiar sense, . . . but rather dispositions of agent-commitment which are deeply integrated in . . . the whole self.”\textsuperscript{34} When we acquire a habit, this habit becomes a character trait. The habit is something we just do all the time. But when we act earnestly, our character traits are integrated in us. That is, they make up who we are. As such, the character we gain from earnestness “\textit{is} the self.”\textsuperscript{35} In earnestness, we do not just have an accidental group of traits that we have acquired over time. Instead, our traits are part of who we are, because they come from deep caring, and caring \textit{is} our character. Thus, the dispositions we gain from caring

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 280-281.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 281.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 279.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Ibid., original emphasis.
\end{itemize}
are also our character. Davenport explains that earnestness involves “a reflexive effort to control and organize our own character in accordance with our concern, if it is truly earnest.”

Dispositions can be accidental habits we have acquired, such as being shy or cheerful, which don’t portray anything about our overall character. However, in earnestness our actions lead to a “volitional character.” That is, our character as a whole that is leading towards a goal.

Davenport explains that in volitional character “earnest caring about anything or anyone else will also involve a reflexive effort to control and organize our own character in accordance with our concern, if it is truly earnest.” A volitional character is a willed character. Here, we make an effort to create our character in a way that coheres with our concerns or our projects. Volitional character is distinct from character in the general sense of the word because when we think of general character, we think of all of our traits combined. My general character can consist of shyness and cheerfulness. These are traits that I do not will into being. They are traits I simply develop accidentally. These traits cannot be traits of volitional character, because volitional character involves a willing and effort to develop these traits.

Next, Davenport explains how disposition and earnestness are related to freedom. He argues that dispositions and habits become “second nature.” He explains that acts of second nature are ones that operate “without the need for continued guidance, reaffirmation, and renewed resolve by the will in its libertarian freedom.” Once something becomes a disposition we no longer need to think about it deeply, we just do it. However, earnest acts always consist of continued guidance, reaffirmation, and renewed resolve. He explains that in earnestness our

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36 Ibid.
37 Ibid., 280.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid., 279.
40 Ibid., 279.
41 Ibid.
choices are a mixture of being conditioned by the past and being free to choose differently and to change. We are not completely conditioned by our past in the sense that we do not need to think about our choices, but our past affects our decisions. We also do not choose freely in the sense of randomly. We are guided by our past, but can still choose to change ourselves. For instance, as a child, Joan may have been physically weak, and because of her weakness was abused by other children. When Joan becomes an adult, she may be disposed to stay away from large groups of people, because of the abuse in her past. Thus, her past has conditioned her. However, Joan is a free being and can always choose to change herself. She can always seek out large groups of people in an attempt to become more social and make new friends.

Davenport argues that MacIntyre does not accept such a freedom in virtue ethics. Instead, he insists that MacIntyre holds that “I am the character defined by a set of ‘longest-term intentions’ attributed to me by the community in whose narrative my character is inscribed.” Following MacIntyre’s notion of character, there is little sense of freedom in creating oneself because my longer term goals and intentions are attributed to me by my community. My community has a narrative in which I fit. This notion of character is different from Kierkegaard’s notion of character because Kierkegaard argues that we have our own narrative which is shaped by our past, but which we can also reshape through our activities and thus also change our character. Davenport maintains that Kierkegaard’s ideas of earnestness and libertarian freedom can add something important to virtue ethics. Earnestness adds the deep caring that is required to make choices based on moral strength, whereas Kierkegaard’s notion of libertarian freedom adds a more flexible and realistic ability to shape and change one’s character.

Although Kierkegaard focuses on an individual’s core narrative, there is still a place for the community in his ethics. Davenport claims that Kierkegaard finds neighbor love to be an

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42 Ibid., 281.
important aspect of ethics. That is, Kierkegaard recognizes that we depend on other human beings and the community and suggests that part of being ethical is to love other human beings. By dependent on others, Davenport explains that Kierkegaard means that we need love. It is in our nature to need love. Thus, Kierkegaard argues that we have a duty to unconditionally love the people in our lives. Furthermore, Davenport claims that MacIntyre holds this idea of neighbor love as well. He points out that MacIntyre argues, “I owe to all particular others a kind of ‘uncalculating giving’ that responds to the basic reality of human dependence on ‘the attentive and affectionate regard of others.’”43 Thus, both Kierkegaard and MacIntyre share this understanding of loving others as a basic part of being virtuous.

After showing how Kierkegaard’s ethics are similar to some claims by MacIntyre and also how his idea of earnestness and freedom can fit with and aid a theory of virtue ethics, Davenport argues that Kierkegaard’s and MacIntyre’s ethics are complementary. He explains that in *Either/Or II* Kierkegaard is attempting to “reconstruct on a new basis what was valuable in eudaimonism.”44 That is, Kierkegaard claims that eudaimonism does not work because there is no all encompassing good for all of humanity.45 Our individual and communal goods conflict. Further, Kierkegaard adds freedom to virtue ethics, and shows that we can each have our own fundamental goal. Our fundamental goals are what create our narrative core. However, these goals can be different for people. We do not all have one underlying human goal we are trying to achieve.

First Davenport explains why MacIntyre needs Kierkegaard for his virtue ethics. MacIntyre argues that we need to acquire certain virtues because we participate in practices that

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44 Ibid., 287.
45 Davenport claims that he argues this in his article, “The Meaning of Kierkegaard’s Choice.”
lead to goals we want to achieve. In participating in these practices, we are automatically in human relationships. To sustain these relationships and reach our goals, we need to acquire certain virtues. We also need these virtues to have a unified life that is leading towards some goal. That is, MacIntyre claims, “The unity of a human life is the unity of a narrative quest.” Moreover, we need virtues to continue on this quest and towards our goals.

Davenport points out two weaknesses with this view. One is that some people do not want to cultivate human relationships, and so they seek out practices that will have as little human involvement as possible. On MacIntyre’s view, these people seem to not need the virtues. Second, some people do not want their life to be a unified quest for some good (goal). These people again, would seem to not need to cultivate virtues. These people are aesthetes according to Kierkegaard. Thus, MacIntyre can’t explain why the aesthete should pursue virtues.

However, Davenport argues that Kierkegaard’s theory of authenticity can solve this problem. Kierkegaard holds, “We cannot have a meaningful and fulfilling life without authentically engaging ourselves in practices or becoming authentically devoted to something worth caring about.” That is, we cannot just engage in practices because we want some external gain after the practice is complete. We have to care about our projects and practices for them to be meaningful and fulfill us. Furthermore, if we try to live without engaging in practices we care about it brings us into despair. Kierkegaard argues, as human beings we naturally need practices and human relationships we care about. Without these practices and relationships, we suffer “a dispersion of identity” which leads to despair. Davenport explains that for Kierkegaard, only through these commitments “can [we] establish an intelligible self with a meaning that endures

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46 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 219 quoted in Davenport, 288.
47 Davenport, 290.
48 Ibid.
over time and thereby fulfills the existential telos of personal narrative unity.”  

Therefore, we should move from an aesthetic position to having these commitments, otherwise we cannot attain fulfillment and we will be in despair. However, following this idea, our normal understanding of a telos has changed. It is not one overarching good that we attempt to achieve. Instead, one’s telos becomes “the existential meaningfulness of her life to the agent.” Thus, our telos is no longer one fundamental good for all humanity, but an individual meaningfulness in each of our projects, practices, and relationships.

Furthermore, Davenport argues that Aristotle’s virtue ethics will not solve the problem found in MacIntyre’s virtue ethics because Aristotle argues that we share a chief good or ultimate telos. According to Davenport, “Aristotle’s belief that eudaimonia defines a single ultimate telos for human life depends on the thesis that there is some way of unifying or harmoniously ordering all the intrinsically valuable ends we can pursue.” For Aristotle we have an overarching good that encompasses everything we find intrinsically valuable, and this is the highest good for all of humanity. However, Davenport argues that Aristotle’s view is an incorrect way to look at our goals. We do not have a chief good in this sense. More often than not, our goods are incompatible and conflict within the individual and among individuals. Davenport agrees with Bernard Williams’ argument that “happiness may … be achieved in different ways of living, each of which aims at some set of goods that is internally consistent, but which conflicts with (some) other such sets of goods and their associated ways of living.”

According to this account, there are many different goods that we desire and different goods which lead to happiness for different people. Moreover, Davenport holds that although our

49 Ibid.
50 Ibid., 291.
51 Ibid.
52 Ibid., 292.
personal goods can conflict, each of us has “ground projects,” and we can try to bring our goods and activities together to make a coherent whole.\textsuperscript{53} He calls this striving for a harmonious unified whole, “existential coherence.”\textsuperscript{54} In other words, people who strive for existential coherence often need to reject some activities or projects or readjust them to fit coherently in their lives. Davenport also admits that not everyone will seek existential coherence, but that “all mature moral agents” will.\textsuperscript{55}

This idea is consistent with Kierkegaard’s idea of authenticity. Authenticity for Kierkegaard is this striving for practical coherence in an individual life. However, Kierkegaard also accepts the idea that not every individual will seek practical coherence. The individuals who do not are in the aesthetic stage of existence. Also, Davenport explains that earnestness “is the form of all the virtues.”\textsuperscript{56} That is, to have a virtue, it needs to be in earnest. All virtues are earnest virtues. Thus, earnestness brings our virtues together making them consistent and constant. This consistency and constancy of our virtues through earnestness further supports an existential coherence and is also something MacIntyre argues that virtue ethics must do. Therefore, Kierkegaard’s ethical theories solve some problems with MacIntyre’s virtue ethics.

Next, Davenport argues that Kierkegaard also needs MacIntyre for a coherent virtue ethics. Kierkegaard runs into some problems with his view of proto-virtues and aestheticism, and MacIntyre can help solve those problems so that Kierkegaard’s views can still ground an adequate theory of virtue ethics. Davenport points out that a major problem with Kierkegaard’s ethics is that his proto-virtues do not require us to be ethical. Take for example the proto-virtue earnestness: we can have ground projects on which we base our lives and about which we care

\textsuperscript{53} Ground projects are the major and most important long term goals we hold for ourselves.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., 293.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 293.
deeply. However, the proto-virtue of caring or earnestness does not require us to choose distinctively moral projects or actions. Davenport points out that “we may not care about being moral.” Furthermore, he introduces an argument from Harry Frankfurt stating, “There is nothing about the nature of caring per se which suggests that it should be important to us to care about ethical distinctions.” Thus, we can accept a ground project like torturing other people simply because we desire it or enjoy it. We might care deeply about this project so that it directs our lives in a certain way, but it is immoral. The problem is that we can acquire Kierkegaard’s proto-virtues, yet still be in the aesthetic stage of existence. That is, Davenport argues that Kierkegaard has two ideas about what it means to be aesthetic. The first form of aestheticism is found in people who do not have “authentic commitments.” These people do not take commitments seriously and are not trying to unify the commitments they have. Davenport writes that they are “without higher-order volitions.” In other words, they do not earnestly will their commitments. The second form of aestheticism is exhibited by people who do not consider ethics in their commitments or projects. Davenport explains these people as people who are in “the phase of life before the objective authority of ethical requirements and ideals has taken on any ‘live’ practical significance for the individual.” The problem Davenport presents for Kierkegaard in regards to these two forms of aestheticism is that people can be beyond the first form of aestheticism, but not the second. These people will have ground projects that they take seriously, care about, and direct their lives towards, but will not determine them based on ethical viewpoints.

Davenport further explains this problem:

57 Ibid., 295.  
58 Ibid.  
59 Ibid., 295.  
60 Ibid.  
61 Ibid.
It is possible to form a unified or integrated volitional character around a set of projects and earnestly to cultivate constancy in one’s devotion to these aims, without taking much account of moral distinctions, or at least without giving them central or overriding significance relative to other persisting devotions, interest, or concerns.\textsuperscript{62}

If we accept Davenport’s argument, we can hold that we can cultivate constancy in our projects in accordance with other proto-virtues as well, such as perseverance. We can persevere by having a drive towards our projects and continue to work towards them in face of all obstacles, but this does not mean in pursuing them we act morally.

Davenport argues that Kierkegaard attempts to solve this problem, but that MacIntyre can also aid Kierkegaard’s response.\textsuperscript{63} Davenport first explains one of Kierkegaard’s responses to this problem:

The serious aesthetic agent’s entire attention is directed outward, and he lacks reflexive earnest concern about maintaining and ordering his commitments to form a stable identity over time. Such an agent therefore remains in “immediacy,” and the conditions for his interests, concerns, and commitments remain outside himself, not under his control. In that sense, these ends cannot really constitute cares or commitments of the higher-order will if they are aesthetically pursued.\textsuperscript{64}

Kierkegaard argues that although the aesthete can have ground projects and can care about them, he does not have the kind of earnestness of the higher order will. A higher order will is one that pursues projects earnestly and cares about inward goals. That is, someone with a higher order will cares about projects and commitments that form their character rather than just produce certain ends. In this example, the commitments the aesthete cares about are outward rather than

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 297.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 296.
inward, they do not help form his identity, and as such they are immediate. That is, the aesthete’s commitments are individual. Aesthetes are only interested in themselves, their own reactions to things, and how things affect them. Kierkegaard contrasts immediacy with mediacy. When we are in the ethical stage, we mediate. We must disclose our actions with the community and take other people into account when making ethical decisions. However, aesthetes do not mediate within the community. The decisions they make are only based on themselves. Thus, in making decisions aesthetes base those decisions on ends they will achieve for themselves. They do not care about forming a certain type of character, and so their commitments are outward. These commitments are not a firm enough foundation to be considered as part of the higher-order will.

Next, Davenport explains that Kierkegaard also holds that the second form of aestheticism implies the first form of aestheticism. That is, either we can be not moral and not committed or we can be moral and committed. However, we cannot be not moral and committed. Kierkegaard does not argue for this position though. Thus, Davenport claims that MacIntyre can help support Kierkegaard’s position. Davenport writes that MacIntyre maintains, “when we move to an understanding of ourselves in terms of the commitments involved in caring about goods internal to practices and relationships in which we engage, then the objective authority of certain virtues, such as honesty, courage, justice, and integrity, must become important to us (even when we violate them).” In other words, we cannot maintain earnest commitments to internal goods without accepting an objective authority of ethics. Moreover, this authority must have meaning to us. Without an ethical framework, we cannot acquire the internal goods we seek in practices. Goods internal to practices are goods that we can only acquire through a specific practice and that we can only recognize and achieve by participating in that practice. MacIntyre

65 Ibid.
66 Ibid., 297.
explains internal goods by an example of chess playing. He explains that if a child, Amy, plays chess for no other reason than that she will be rewarded with candy, she is participating in the practice for an external good. There is nothing about chess playing by itself that allows her to achieve this good. Here, there is no reason for her not cheat to win if she can acquire more candy by doing so. External goods are goods we can acquire from many means. They are not specific to the practice. However, if Amy plays chess because she wants to acquire goods that one gains from playing chess, such as “analytical skill, strategic imagination and competitive intensity,” then she is playing to acquire internal goods. That is, she is playing to acquire goods that she can only gain by playing chess. Here, if Amy cheats to win, she will not be able to attain the goods internal to chess playing. Thus, MacIntyre argues, “We have to accept as necessary components of any practice with internal goods and standards of excellence the virtues of justice, courage and honesty.” Let’s look at honesty for example. For Amy to acquire the internal goods she strives for in chess playing she must accept the objective authority of honesty because she cannot acquire such internal goods without being an honest chess player. If she acts dishonestly in chess playing and cheats, she will not have the experience in chess playing that enables her to acquire internal goods such as strategic imagination. If she cheats, she will not be challenged to create new strategies and so will not gain that internal good of chess playing.

If we look at MacIntyre’s argument about internal goods to practices in light of the aesthete, we can see that if aesthete’s are committed to internal goods, they will need to gain them through participation in practices, and in doing so, they must accept the objective authority of virtues like justice, courage and honesty. To reject these virtues is exactly what it means to be uncommitted to the internal goods. In other words, in order to be committed we must be moral.

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67 MacIntyre, 188
68 Ibid., 191.
MacIntyre’s argument follows Kierkegaard’s claim that the first form of aestheticism implies the second form. Davenport also argues, “No self integration can be complete unless it is ultimately guided by values that have the distinctive universality and necessity of moral norms.”\(^{69}\) When our desires are the only motivations for us to make decisions, our commitments change constantly (since our desires change constantly). Thus, we have no narrative whole. We only have many different desires that we attempt to achieve. An ethical framework, on the other hand, drives us to acquire a narrative whole. That is, we take our cares and desires and integrate them based on that framework, creating a narrative whole. Both Kierkegaard and MacIntyre hold that the commitments of the aesthete are too fleeting for the higher-order will. Even if the aesthete is serious about his commitments and directs his life towards them, without an ethical basis to provide a firmer foundation for them, they can always be replaced on a whim. However, if we have an idea of strong ethical contrasts, then our commitments become more significant. Davenport argues that “ethical evaluation always forces us to this higher level: if it is right to pursue a given end in a particular way, then it is usually noble to preserve the passion itself.”\(^{70}\) That is, if we think an action is morally right or virtuous, then we are more likely to hold onto the passion, and thus we are more likely to bring our commitments together to form a narrative and thus a whole self. On the other hand, if we have a commitment to something because it is a passion and become bored with it or find a new passion, nothing is driving us to hold onto the previous passion. We might let go of our previous passion and move onto the new more intense one. We have no reason to continue living for the previous passion. So the aesthete may have commitments to passions, and these passions may be serious. These passions may guide the aesthete’s life, and the aesthete may order his life around a few intense passions (these being his

\(^{69}\) Davenport, 297.  
\(^{70}\) Ibid, 299.
commitments). Nevertheless, once aesthetes are no longer passionate about something, they have no reason to continue holding onto it and guiding their lives according to it. However, the ethical individual’s commitments are beyond mere passion and desire. The ethical individual also sees something right about his goals. For Kierkegaard and MacIntyre ethics is a firmer foundation for our goals and life projects than passion is. Thus, the ethical individual has stronger and more serious commitments to his goals. Ethical individuals have stronger commitments because they base their commitments on objective authority derived from inward cares, rather than on desires. Thus, the second form of aestheticism implies the first form—because if the ethical is taken away, then the ability to have truly serious commitments is also taken away. MacIntyre aids Kierkegaard’s position here, because he has an argument for it. Kierkegaard claims that the second form of aestheticism implies the first form, but MacIntyre argues for why that is the case.

Finally, Davenport explains how we choose between good and evil according to Kierkegaard and what this means for an existential virtue ethics. Davenport explains that according to Plato, we commit evil because we are ignorant. He holds that we all inherently want what is best for us and thus what is good. However, we sometimes choose evil and do this because we think it is actually good. Aristotle adds to Plato’s argument by claiming that we can also choose evil because of strong emotions such as anger. However, Kierkegaard holds that although both of these accounts of why human beings perform evil actions are correct, both Plato and Aristotle miss an important aspect for why we act evilly. Following Augustine, Kierkegaard holds that we can also choose to commit evil. Choosing evil is not simply a misunderstanding because we think the actions are actually good, nor are we only committing evil out of strong emotion here. We can also knowingly choose evil. He writes, “sin is not a matter of a person’s not having understood what is right but of his being unwilling to understand it, of his not willing

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71 Ibid., 302-3.
Kierkegaard argues that one reason for acting evil is that we choose to ignore ethics. We commit evil acts out of will, which is a choice. We make a choice to not allow ethics to matter. This choice of evil is related to the aesthete. The aesthete is capable of understanding ethical contrasts and basing his decisions on those contrasts, but he chooses to make his commitments based on desire, rather than ethics. We would not say that the aesthete is ignorant of what is evil, but that he is unwilling to care about ethics. Thus, for Kierkegaard we are not automatically led to good and virtuous decisions through knowledge. Freedom is involved in both good and evil actions. We must choose to act in good or evil ways.

If we accept Kierkegaard’s notion that we choose evil, then we cannot hold with Plato that becoming more knowledgeable will lead us to the good. That is, it does not reside in human nature to find the good merely through intelligence. Davenport instead argues that following Kierkegaard, “Only through earnest willing in the face of alternative possibilities, which involves a process of cultivating our own entrenched dispositions of freedom, can we become thoroughly devoted to the goods we are meant and required by moral ideals to pursue.” In other words, to become good or virtuous, we have to choose between possibilities in our lives. If we choose ethically, then we will become more devoted to commitments that we consider moral or good and will continue towards a path of moral ideals. Davenport calls this “the position of existential virtue ethics.” Moreover, Davenport argues that this idea of choosing a moral path is not something we can simply do on our own. He points out, “the development of an earnest will may have a myriad of social conditions that are necessary though not sufficient for it.” I take this to mean that if I am surrounded by people who have not developed an earnest will and who always

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72 Søren Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death*: 95 quoted in Davenport, 303.
73 Ibid., 305.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid., 306.
make choices based on desire, I most likely will not develop an earnest will myself. However, if I am surrounded by people who are making choices from an earnest will or are in the process of developing an earnest will, it’s much more likely I will develop an earnest will. We are influenced by our social conditions, and thus choosing a moral path will not depend solely on my own decisions, but also on the influences of my community.

Furthermore, my social conditions are not the only circumstances that affect my moral decisions, but my past decisions affect my moral character as well. Davenport argues, “Once it has started to have a significant role in our lives, moral sensitivity grows as we attend to it, or atrophies as we suppress or ignore it when convenient.”

That is, my perception of moral or immoral situations will grow or diminish depending whether or not I attend to these situations. For example, I may see a homeless person on the street and understand morally that I should try to help that person. However, if I ignore that person and I keep ignoring the homeless even though I know that helping them is the morally right thing to do, I will eventually not perceive the homeless person at all. I will not notice the moral decision I should make about the homeless person. Here, my moral sensitivity dims. Likewise, the more I perceive moral or immoral situations and recognize how to act morally, the more sensitive to being moral I will become. That is, if I see the homeless person and decide to help, then I will later become more sensitive to what ways are better or worse for helping. Thus, my sensitivity to moral situations increases. Our ethical decisions change our character, and depending on what actions we perform, we condition ourselves towards either a moral path or an immoral one. Let us look at Davenport’s argument for making immoral decisions:

Against this background of ethical understanding, it is difficult, but not impossible, to choose commitments and particular actions we know with great clarity and force to be

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76 Ibid., 308.
despicable, dishonorable, dishonest or deceitful, cruel, callous, uncaring and so on. Yet if we do will against our conscience or present sense of how to apply such evaluations . . . then the entire background of moral understanding—or at least relevant parts of it—shifts away from us, dimming both in conceptual clarity and gerundive force or hold on our will.\textsuperscript{77}

Whether we attend to situations we perceive as moral or immoral will determine those perceptions later. So, if I ignore many immoral situations even though I am sensitive to their being immoral, my perceptions of the situations will dim. From ignoring these situations and perceptions of them dimming, I will become less moral. In choosing these immoral actions, we are ignoring our conscience, and thus our sensitivity to what is moral dims. The more we ignore immoral situations, the more our sensitivity dims, and the less likely we are to recognize those situations in the future.

Next, Davenport explains that making good moral decisions leads to these decisions in the future as well. Davenport argues that when we make decisions for moral actions, we become more sensitive to distinctions between what is moral and what is immoral:

The more we choose good over evil, or the more firmly we commit ourselves to virtuous motives and dispositions . . . in forming our projects, the keener our moral sensitivity grows, and the stronger becomes the bond between our cognitive receptivity to moral considerations and our volitional disposition to be guided by such moral understanding.\textsuperscript{78}

This strengthening of our cognitive receptivity is also related to the shift from the aesthetic viewpoint to the ethical viewpoint. When we think aesthetically, we choose based on desire and passion. However, there comes a point where most people will begin to recognize ethical

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 304.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid, 307.
contrasts, and then they will begin to make decisions based on these ethical contrasts. Aesthetes have not become ethical once they make one decision based on ethics. However, the more they make decisions based on ethical contrasts, the less they will base their decisions on passion and the more they will base them on ethics. Here, aesthetes have become more sensitive to ethics. The same happens when we make decisions about moral or immoral actions. As we commit actions that are moral and begin to acquire projects based on ethics rather than passion, we become more sensitive to moral situations. We recognize subtler moral distinctions.

Thus, for Kierkegaard we become more moral by making good ethical decisions. Our freedom is an important part of our being ethical agents. We choose to move from the aesthetic stage of goals of desire and passion to the ethical stage with goals of what we think is good and right. We choose between moral actions and immoral actions thus solidifying our commitments and our character. It is not in our nature to be good. We do not simply become more knowledgeable and rational to become more ethical. Instead, we must decide to be ethical and we must care about our goals to be that way.

Davenport’s goal in this article is to ground an existential virtue ethics using Kierkegaard’s and MacIntyre’s philosophies. Davenport rejects that the Aristotelian idea of an ultimate all encompassing end which is natural for all humanity and can be ascertained through rationality. He claims that this is an unrealistic ideal, and we can never live up to it. To make virtue ethics more realistic and attainable for humanity, we need an existential foundation. Through Kierkegaard’s notions of freedom, dispositional character, earnestness, and narrative unity, Davenport claims we are able to formulate a better, more realistic virtue ethics. His point is that we do make choices about our passions and ethics, and we do not all have the same goal towards the same rational natural end. Instead, we choose between passions and individual goals;
but this does not mean that we choose randomly, or that ethics is unattainable. Following Kierkegaard’s existentialism, we can see that we are capable of making rational choices about personal ends and still attain deep commitments to those ends which we choose based on ethical criteria. Further, we can achieve a whole unified identity in this process.
CHAPTER 2

For this thesis, I argue that Sartre’s existential philosophy in *Being and Nothingness* can ground a theory of virtue ethics. To argue that Sartre’s existential philosophy provides a ground for virtue ethics, I need to first explain Sartre’s relevant existential notions from *Being and Nothingness*. I can then argue that these notions support a theory of virtue ethics. In this chapter, I will explain three important notions that Sartre presents in *Being and Nothingness*: freedom, end projects that we choose for our lives, and values. I will later use Detmer’s interpretation of Sartre to show how these notions can establish an existential version of virtue ethics.

The first of Sartre’s notions I will discuss is freedom. Sartre describes freedom in many different ways and within many different contexts throughout *Being and Nothingness*. He describes freedom as “the first condition of action,” “the nothingness which is made-to-be at the heart of man,” “the being of man,” and “the foundation of values.” These statements seem obscure and disparate. However, these statements about freedom stem from the same source: human beings.

For Sartre, human beings consist of two beings: being-in-itself and being-for-itself. Being-in-itself is our body. It is the physical stuff of which we are made. Being-for-itself is our consciousness. It is what makes us human because it is the part of us that is free. Our consciousness is free because it nihilates. That is, our consciousness perceives the in-itself around us (i.e. the physical stuff), and it differentiates between the in-itself. It does this through

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79 Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Being and Nothingness* (NY: Washington Square Press. 1992), 559,568,60,76. (Later abbreviated as: BN.)
negation. Consciousness perceives a tree and notices that a tree is not a cat, or grass, or sky, or a building. Thus, through consciousness, we are capable of negation, and human beings are free because of this ability to negate. Just as we can perceive a tree and think that it is not a cat, we can perceive ourselves and realize what we are not. We can then choose to attempt to be what we are not. The ability to choose a projected value that I do not have now is freedom for Sartre. Sartre explains this as, “I am the self which I will be, in the mode of not being it.”\(^{80}\) In other words, I cannot now be the self that I will be (in the future). The person I am in the future is different from the person I am now. I have to not be the person I will be in the future now (otherwise, I would already be that person). Understanding ourselves in this way is an act of negation. We imagine future selves that are not us now. We choose to try and become those selves that we are not. We can make this kind of choice only because we are capable of imagining something that is not.

Sartre describes the ability to negate and project a future further when he writes, “Human reality is free because … it has been separated by a nothingness from what it is and from what it will be.”\(^{81}\) Living for human beings is always a striving for the future, for what we will be doing and how we will be acting in the future. We are never simply what we are in a moment. We are always what we are along with what we are striving to be. Sartre explains, “Freedom is not a being; it is the being of man—i.e., his nothingness of being.”\(^{82}\) Freedom is not a mere part of being human. It is what determines us as human beings. Further, freedom is our nothingness in the sense that we understand it from what we are not. It is our ability to view ourselves as a negation and project future selves.

\(^{80}\) Sartre, Jean-Paul, *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre* (Random House.,1972), 119, original emphasis.
\(^{81}\) Sartre, BN, 568.
\(^{82}\) Ibid., 569, original emphasis.
For instance, if someone asked me to describe who I am, I may answer that I am a philosopher. That person then may ask me, how am I philosopher? What does it mean to be a philosopher? I would reply that I am enrolled in a college and in a philosophy program, I read philosophy, discuss it, and write about it. However, I never become a philosopher. There is no point where I have done all there is to be a philosopher and I can stop doing philosophy. A nothingness is involved here because to be a philosopher, I must always strive to be a philosopher. I will never accomplish my goal. Thus, I am always becoming and there is always a not to what I am. This negation of myself as a philosopher and my ability to choose to do philosophy is my freedom.

David Detmer presents Sartre’s notion of freedom in the human being with six examples. However, I will focus on only two of his examples for the sake of length. His first example is imagination. Detmer argues that imagination is different from perception because “the image involves a certain nothingness.” That is, in imagination, we have an image of something that is absent, and thus imagination is a negative act. Detmer uses the example of a guitar case. We see a guitar case and notice that the guitar is absent because we have an image of the guitar as not there. Imagination is different from perception because in perception the things around us are forced on us. In imagination, we are free to picture an image.

Detmer’s second example for the freedom of consciousness is destruction. Detmer points out that for Sartre the human being is the only being that can view occurrences as destruction. He explains that destruction is only possible “to a witness who can ‘nihilate’ these results by recalling what is not.” That is, when an earth quake destroys a city, only human beings see this as destruction because we can remember the city prior to the earthquake. The city is now gone, and so we see it as destroyed. Everything else in the universe views the destroyed city as a

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84 Ibid., 28,original emphasis.
rearrangement of in-itself. Non-conscious beings do not consider the city destroyed but changed.

In fact, it is never even a city for non-conscious beings. It is just in-itself that was once arranged in one way and is now arranged in another way. Furthermore, Detmer argues that “destruction cannot come into being without nihilating acts of consciousness; and nihilating acts of consciousness … are possible only for a free consciousness.”

As I explained previously, Sartre claims that human beings are the only beings that can nihilate, and this ability of nihilation is what demonstrates freedom. Thus, it is through freedom that we can view occurrences in the world as destructive.

In *Being and Nothingness*, the chapter in which Sartre explains freedom is called, “Being and Doing: Freedom.” We have now determined what makes freedom being (i.e. it is human being), so we must turn to what makes freedom doing or action for Sartre. Action is intentional according to Sartre. It is not accidental. In other words, action is a choice and so involves freedom. In action, we want something that is not or that we do not have. Action requires that our consciousness “withdraw itself from the full world,” be able to see non-being, and to place a value on non-being. First, we envision what is not. Second, we value that not being. Finally, we act to realize the not.

To explain this movement Sartre uses the example of the worker. Tim, the worker, suffers at his job. However, this job is the only thing he knows, so he does not consider it “unbearable.” Since Tim cannot imagine a state different from this job, he does not act to change his situation. But, if Tim is able to take a step back and reflect on the job, he may be able to imagine a situation where he did not have this job. He may then value this other situation. He

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85 Ibid., original emphasis.
86 Sartre, BN, 559.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid., 560.
89 Ibid., 561.
will then view his job as suffering and act to change it into his imagined situation. If Tim could not imagine a state that was not his state now, he would not be able to act. Thus, Sartre argues, “We must recognize that the indispensable and fundamental condition of all action is the freedom of the acting being.”  

We cannot have freedom without nothingness. To make a choice and act on it, we need the ability to conceive of something that is not and we need to be able to value what is not. The value of the not is what drives us to make a choice and act on it. Thus, valuing is a condition of freedom, because to make choices we need to value. This ability to conceive of the not is our freedom, and the ability to act on it is freedom that comes from valuing.

We have determined that we need the ability to nihilate to have freedom and that action requires freedom. We must also consider how free human beings are. Sartre claims that human beings are “wholly free.” That is, we choose who we are. We choose our values and our projects. Furthermore, we are free to adopt new values and new projects at any time. Sartre explains how we choose who we are through our projects:

Human reality in and through its very upsurge decides to define its own being by its ends. It is therefore the positing of my ultimate ends which characterizes my being and which is identical with the sudden thrust of freedom which is mine. And this thrust is an existence; it has nothing to do with an essence or with a property of a being which would be engendered conjointly with an idea.

Here, Sartre explains that human beings have no essence. We do not have an already determined substantive end that determines what we are. Instead, we choose our own ends and thus our own

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90 Ibid., 563.
91 Ibid., 571.
92 Ibid., 572.
93 Ibid., 572, original emphasis.
being. We choose what we value and what we want to strive for in our lives. The ability to choose these things is our freedom. Thus, our freedom is what creates our being or character. We are free to choose who we are, what we do, and our reactions to circumstances.

To help give a better understanding of what he means by freedom, Sartre also describes certain ways in which we consider our freedom is limited. He argues:

Much more than he appears ‘to make himself,’ man seems ‘to be made’ by climate and the earth, race and class, language, the history of the collectivity of which he is a part, heredity, the individual circumstances of his childhood, acquired habits, the great and small events of his life.94

Sartre points out that it seems as though we are not as free as he previously describes. Our freedom appears to be limited by many conditions in our lives. However, Sartre disagrees with this assessment of freedom. He explains, “Thus although brute things … can from the start limit our freedom of action, it is our freedom itself which must first constitute the framework, the technique, and the ends in relation to which they will manifest themselves as limits.”95 Sartre argues that although it appears as though objects in the world (for example, a fence, a person, a missing arm, etc.) limit our freedom, these things can do so only because we are free. That is, it is through our freedom that we decide our projects and only by having these freely determined projects can objects appear as limits to freedom at all.

Sartre uses the example of a crag in a rock to explain freedom involved with obstacles in the world.96 If my goal is to scale this particular rock, then the crag will appear as an obstacle to me. It may seem to me that this crag, this object in the world, is limiting my freedom. It is limiting because I want to scale the rock, and I cannot because of the crag. However, Sartre

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94 Ibid., 619.
95 Ibid., 620.
96 Ibid.
argues that this crag is an obstacle because I want to scale the rock. It is because of my freely chosen project (scaling the rock), that this crag is limiting. My free choice constitutes the crag as an obstacle. If, on the other hand, I didn’t care about scaling rocks, and instead I wanted to view nice scenery, then this crag would no longer be an obstacle. As Sartre explains, if viewing nice scenery is my goal, then the rock “is manifested only as beautiful or ugly.”97 This kind of limitation is a limitation by our situation according to Sartre.98 Depending on our projects, we are in a certain situation. Thus, we often view our situation as limiting because of our freely chosen projects.99

Furthermore, Sartre argues that this kind of limitation to my freedom is actually not limiting at all. Instead, it allows our freedom to appear to us. He explains, “If the object is simply conceived, it will no longer be chosen or merely wished for. Once the distinction between the simple wish, the representation which I could choose, and the choice is abolished, freedom disappears too.”100 Simply put, we can really have freedom only if we have a choice. If everything we wished for or conceived of simply appeared before us, we would never have to choose between anything. All we wanted, we would instantly have. We would thus have no need of freedom because nothing would separate us from what we want. On the other hand, since not everything we want appears instantly before us, we need to make choices in life. We need to decide for what to struggle, what to pursue, or what to obtain. To do this we need freedom. Since the crag is an obstacle for me in scaling the rock, I must decide to scale the rock. This decision expresses my freedom to choose whether to act on my desire.

97 Ibid., 627.
98 Ibid., 619.
99 Sartre also describes other ways in which we consider ourselves limited by the physical world, such as place, facticity, past, environment, other people, and death.
100 Ibid., 621, original emphasis.
Detmer claims that Sartre does indeed accept some limitation to freedom, even though here Sartre argues that the things we normally consider as limiting are in fact conditioned by freedom. Detmer points out that all of the examples Sartre presents (such as situation, facticity, coefficient of adversity, etc.) as not freedom limiting, in a sense do limit freedom. Not only do they limit freedom, but Sartre agrees that they do according to Detmer. Detmer argues, “It must be emphasized, first of all, that Sartre has always recognized the existence of constraints upon, and limitations to freedom.”\(^{101}\) Although this argument seems contradictory to Sartre’s main point in this chapter, I think Detmer is correct here. That is, in this chapter, Sartre is arguing that the way in which we normally perceive of these things as limitations of freedom is incorrect. However, he does accept that they are limiting, but not limiting to the freedom he describes.

Normally, we think that the crag in the rock is limiting because we cannot get what we want. We cannot climb the rock. Thus, we think that the crag is limiting our freedom. Sartre agrees that the crag is limiting our freedom in the sense that we cannot get what we want, but he disagrees that it is limiting to our freedom in the sense that we cannot choose and act on that choice. Detmer explains this distinction in terms of ontological freedom (i.e. freedom of choice) and practical freedom (i.e. freedom of obtaining).\(^{102}\) Detmer argues that Sartre distinguishes between two types of freedom. We have ontological freedom, which is not limited by obstacles in the world. In ontological freedom we are “absolutely free” and “success is not important.”\(^{103}\) This freedom is our freedom to choose what we want to do and then attempt to do it. When Sartre describes human beings as completely free, absolutely free, wholly free and so on, he is describing ontological freedom. We can always choose otherwise, and we can always try to change our situation. However, we may fail, but this is not because of a limitation to our

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\(^{101}\) Detmer, 39-40.

\(^{102}\) Ibid., 59-60.

\(^{103}\) Ibid., 63.
ontological freedom. With practical freedom on the other hand, “success is important” and “we are free only in varying degrees, and quite often unfree.”

This freedom is our freedom to get the things that we desire or need. Here, we are limited by obstacles in the world because they can impede our getting what we desire or need.

Sartre points out that by freedom he does not mean “‘to obtain what one has wished’ but rather ‘by oneself to determine oneself to wish’ (in the broad sense of choosing).” Thus, he argues that our ontological freedom is not limited. He accepts however, that our practical freedom is limited by certain objects and situations in the world. In this chapter, when Sartre argues that our freedom is absolute and not limited by anything in the world, what he means is that our ontological freedom, our ability to choose, is not limited by anything in the world.

Furthermore, Detmer argues that ontological freedom is the foundation of practical freedom. In other words, conceptually we need to be ontologically free in order to be practically free or practically unfree. We cannot have practical freedom without ontological freedom. However, what Detmer misses, I think, is that practical freedom is also needed for us to have ontological freedom according to Sartre. Thus, although they are two different kinds of freedom, they are connected in a way that we cannot have one without the other. Sartre points this out in the crag example above. When Sartre argues that these obstacles such as the crag allow our freedom to appear to us, he is making a distinction between ontological and practical freedom. He explains that obstacles are not limiting, as we think they are, because without them we cannot be ontologically free. As I just described, Sartre holds that we cannot have choice without these limitations. So, in order to be ontologically free, we need some difficulty with our practical freedom (i.e. some difficulty in obtaining our desire or need). That is, in order to make

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104 Ibid., 59-60.
105 Sartre, BN, 621.
106 Detmer, 69.
choices, we need limitations to what we can obtain. If everything we wished for, we just got with no limitation, we would not need to make choices. Moreover, we need ontological freedom in order to be either practically free or unfree. That is, we cannot have the freedom to obtain without first the freedom to make choices. Thus, ontological and practical freedom depend on one another.

Furthermore, as Detmer points out, Sartre is not only talking about an “inner freedom” here. That is, he is not simply arguing that we all have a freedom to think certain things or want certain things, but that we have the capacity to act on those things. Sartre explains, “Our description of freedom, since it does not distinguish between choosing and doing, compels us to abandon at once the distinction between the intention and the act.” When Sartre uses the term freedom, he does not only argue that we have the freedom to desire something in consciousness. This freedom of desire is only the first step involved in being free. Our freedom to act is also tied up with our freedom of consciousness. When we actually choose something consciously, we attempt to make that choice a reality. Thus, we act. Sartre explains that to desire or think about something is not the same as to choose it. Our intentions or making a conscious choice about something is an action. It is not important for Sartre’s notion of ontological freedom that we can complete or obtain our goal, but part of what ontological freedom is for Sartre is the action of intent.

Sartre presents an example to help explain what he means by ontological freedom as an intention and act:

It is necessary, however, to note that the choice, being identical with acting, supposes a commencement of realization in order that the choice may be distinguished from the

107 Ibid.
108 Sartre, BN, 622.
dream and the wish. Thus we shall not say that a prisoner is always free to go out of prison, which would be absurd, nor that he is always free to long for release, which would be an irrelevant truism, but that he is always free to try to escape (or get himself liberated); that is, that whatever his condition may be, he can project his escape and learn the value of his project by undertaking some action.\textsuperscript{109}

Following this example, we can distinguish three types of freedom: (1) Purely conscious freedom (i.e. the freedom to think, desire, wish), (2) purely practical freedom (i.e. the freedom to obtain), and (3) ontological freedom (i.e. the freedom to choose and act). In Sartre’s prisoner example, the freedom to desire to leave prison is (1), the freedom to go out of prison is (2), and the freedom to project escape and undertake an action from that projection is (3). However, generally when Sartre uses the notion of freedom, he means ontological freedom. This freedom is absolute because we always have the ability to project something different and take action to attempt to make that projection a reality. We also always have purely conscious freedom, but Sartre calls this an “irrelevant truism.\textsuperscript{110}.” The truth of this is obvious to everyone, and it doesn’t add any meaningful information to the notion of human freedom. Finally, purely practical freedom is something human beings obviously do not have all of the time, as Sartre points out in the crag example. We are not free to scale the rock, even if we want too, if the crag makes the rock un-scalable.

We have therefore determined what Sartre means by freedom in \textit{Being and Nothingness}. Freedom is realized from the nihilating ability of human consciousness. Freedom is what makes us human because it is the part of us that values a nothingness and allows us to always strive to be more than what we are at this moment. Furthermore, there are two kinds of freedom.

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
Ontological freedom is our unlimited ability to choose and to act on our choices. Practical freedom is our ability to obtain that which we have freely chosen to pursue.

A second notion Sartre describes in Being and Nothingness is that of projects or end goals which human beings use to direct their lives.\footnote{I will use the terms projects and end goals synonymously throughout this thesis.} We base the way we live our lives on these projects we create for ourselves. We view the world in particular ways and act in particular ways because of our chosen projects. Our projects are possible only because of our freedom to choose. We are also free to change our projects at anytime, although it may be difficult to do so. Sartre maintains that we all have these projects and that they are what create our character—we have no essence outside of our chosen projects:

Human reality can not receive its ends, as we have seen, either from outside or from a so-called inner “nature.” It chooses them and by this very choice confers upon them a transcendental existence as the external limit of its projects. … Human reality in and through its very upsurge decides to define its own being by its ends. It is therefore the positing of my ultimate ends which characterizes my being and which is identical with the sudden thrust of the freedom which is mine. And this thrust is an existence; it has nothing to do with an essence or with a property of a being which would be engendered conjointly with an idea.\footnote{Ibid., 572, original emphasis.}

Sartre explains that human beings do not have pre-determined ends or a pre-determined nature that we receive from outside ourselves. Instead, we are totally free, and as such we choose our own ultimate substantive ends. These chosen ends are what make us who we are. They determine our character and our being. Our freedom expressed in our projects is our existence. It is not our
essence. That is, we exist as free. Through our freedom, we can choose our being. We have the ability to choose our own way of being through projects or end goals.

Furthermore, our projects arise from our chosen values for Sartre. We choose the ends that we decide are valuable. For instance, Sartre explains that we may accept a low salary rather than no job at all from fear of dying of starvation, but we fear this because of an end that we have chosen. He writes, “Fear is understood in turn only in relation to the value which I implicitly give to this life; that is, it is referred to that hierarchal system of ideal objects which are values.”

Therefore, I choose life as one of my projects because I choose to value life. Fear then arises from my low salary because it may disrupt my project of living. I have this project of living because I value life. Moreover, Sartre describes valuing as a hierarchal system. I may choose to value life and from this value other values and other projects emerge. From these projects and values more projects and values may emerge, ends or projects that promote my more comprehensive end of living. Thus, Sartre proposes a hierarchal system with greater substantive values at the top which lead to other projects and values.

Sartre argues that we choose our fears, desires, motives, and so on in virtue of our projects. We choose our projects, these projects determine our values, and these values determine our fears, desires and motives. He writes, “The meaning held for me by this desire, this fear, these objective considerations of the world when presently I project myself toward my futures—this must be decided by me alone.” I choose my projects, and these projects confer meaning onto my fears, desires, and other considerations I have of the world. That is, I value first and then from having that value, I fear, I desire, and I am motivated. My fear, desire, and motives have meaning only insofar as they are related to my values. Thus, I alone decide on these fears.

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113 Ibid., 564, original emphasis.
114 Ibid., 580.
desires, and considerations. For example, I value life and because of this value, I fear death, desire health, and I am moved to act in ways to gain health and avoid death. Sartre argues, “Actually causes and motives have only the weight which my project—i.e., the free production of the end and of the known act to be realized—confers upon them. When I deliberate, the chips are down.”\textsuperscript{115} Causes and motives also have meaning only based on the projects I have freely chosen. Moreover, Sartre writes, \textit{when I deliberate, the chips are down}. In other words, when I am in a position to deliberate, I have already chosen my values and ends. I deliberate because of the values I have chosen already.

Sartre presents an example of fatigue to explain his notion of projects.\textsuperscript{116} He describes hiking with some friends. His friends are in the same health and are physically in the same shape as Sartre. However, at a certain point in the hike Sartre feels overwhelmed with fatigue and stops to rest. His friends continue hiking until they get to a resting point later on. They then come back and ask him why he did not keep walking until he made it to the resting point. They argue that he did not have to stop. He could have pushed through the fatigue and made it to the resting point. Sartre explains, “There is no doubt that I could have done otherwise, but that is not the problem. It ought to be formulated like this: could I have done otherwise without perceptibly modifying the organic totality of the projects which I am?”\textsuperscript{117} Thus, Sartre points out that we have these freely chosen projects, and these projects are unified into a totality. This totality is who we are as human beings. Then he asks, is giving in to the fatigue at that time part of this totality? Is it part of who he is? In other words, if he did keep struggling on and stop at the resting point, would that have changed his projects and thus who he is? Sartre answers yes to this question, but before

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 581.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., 584-591.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 585.
we address his answer, we should determine how the feeling of fatigue relates to Sartre’s projects.

Sartre argues that as he is walking, the walk slowly becomes more difficult. The slopes seem steeper and the temperature seems hotter. As this happens, his fatigue is there, but he does not think of it as fatigue yet. Eventually there comes a point when he does think of his fatigue. When he does this, he is choosing to suffer his fatigue. He explains:

It is not at all a contemplative apprehension of my fatigue; rather as we saw with respect to pain, I suffer my fatigue. That is, a reflective consciousness is directed upon my fatigue in order to live it and to confer on it a value and a practical relation to myself. It is only on this plane that the fatigue will appear to me as bearable or intolerable. It will never be anything in itself, but is the reflective For-itself which rising up suffers the fatigue as intolerable.\textsuperscript{118}

Therefore, in this example, when Sartre feels his fatigue he chooses it and chooses to confer a value to it. That is, he needs to direct his consciousness to his fatigue to decide if his fatigue is bearable or intolerable. By directing his consciousness to his fatigue, he is suffering his fatigue. Thus, in suffering his fatigue he decides it is intolerable and stops to rest. This decision to stop and rest is not just because of his fatigue, but because of how the fatigue relates to the totality of his projects. Sartre has certain values he places on the world and from those projects arise. Depending on these values and projects, he will determine whether suffering his fatigue is worth it. He will decide whether suffering the fatigue is valuable from his perspective on his life.

Furthermore, Sartre explains that his friends, who continued walking when he decided to stop, have different projects and values. Thus, they are able to value their fatigue. He points out that if he asks one of his friends, John, if he feels fatigue, John will respond “that he loves his

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 586, emphasis Sartre’s.
fatigue. … It appears to him in some way as the privileged instrument for discovering the world which surrounds him.”\textsuperscript{119} John values his fatigue because he perceives it as allowing him to understand the world in a better way. Sartre argues that for John, “Finally the feeling of effort is for him that of fatigue overcome.”\textsuperscript{120} Pushing on beyond his feeling of fatigue is important for him because it demonstrates his effort. Thus, Sartre argues, “It is only in and through this project that the fatigue will be able to be understood and that it will have meaning for [John].”\textsuperscript{121} John’s projects are such that he can value his fatigue, and his fatigue can have meaning for him. Therefore, John can continue walking even after suffering his fatigue. When John suffers his fatigue, he determines that his fatigue is bearable because it is precisely this fatigue that gives him a way to discover the world. Suffering his fatigue also allows him to feel a sense of accomplishment over the mountain, since overcoming the fatigue is a demonstration of his effort. Depending on our projects, we will experience the world in different ways. Sartre experiences his fatigue as intolerable because of his projects, while his friend experiences it as bearable because of his projects.

We are now in the position to understand why Sartre answers yes to the question: if he chose otherwise, that is, if he chose to keep walking after suffering his fatigue, would that change who he is? Sartre argues, “Hence it becomes evident that we can not suppose that the act could have been modified without at the same time supposing a fundamental modification of my original choice of myself.”\textsuperscript{122} Sartre gives in to his fatigue by resting because of his projects. He has chosen his projects based on what he decides is valuable in the world. Thus, these projects constitute Sartre’s choosing of himself. He determines who he is by choosing the projects he

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 587.
\item \textsuperscript{121} Ibid., my interpolation.
\item \textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 597.
\end{itemize}
chooses, and these projects are what lead him to give into the fatigue. He explains, “This way of yielding to fatigue … is placed within the compass of a certain view of the world in which difficulties can appear ‘not worth the trouble of being tolerated.’” Sartre’s view of the world which is constituted by the projects he has chosen, is one in which difficulties can appear not worth the trouble of being tolerated. In this specific example, fatigue is not worth the trouble of being tolerated. However, John’s projects are such that the difficulty of fatigue is worth the trouble of being tolerated. Each of these viewpoints on fatigue (that is, Sartre’s and John’s), depends on the person’s projects and thus choice of himself. Therefore, if Sartre were to bear the fatigue and keep walking, it would change who he is, and similarly if John were to give into his fatigue. The giving in or not to fatigue depends on what the fatigue means to the person, and the meaning of the fatigue depends on the person’s values and projects in the world. These values and projects give people perspectives on the world that determine whether they will give in to things such as fatigue. Thus, if Sartre were to decide to keep walking, it would be because he changed the way he views the world, his projects, and his values. From this new view of the world, he would confer meaning onto fatigue, and this would change who he is.

Therefore, our projects are possible only through our freedom. We can choose our projects, and we are always free to change them. That is, we are always free to choose otherwise, but this is difficult because choosing differently involves changing our unified projects and values. It involves changing our perspective of the world. Further, choosing differently changes our being. Our projects determine who we are and how we view and value the world around us.

A third important notion in Being and Nothingness that will help us determine if Sartre can have an existential virtue ethics is his notion of value. Value is related to both freedom and projects. Value helps us recognize our freedom to choose because we must value something

\[123\text{ Ibid.}\]
different from what we have, and we can then act to change our situation. We also choose our projects based on our values and derive secondary values from our projects.

Sartre argues that our values are subjective. That is, we create them and determine them. We decide what is and what is not a value. He writes, “It follows that my freedom is the unique foundation of values and that *nothing*, absolutely nothing, justifies me in adopting this or that particular value, this or that particular scale of values.”

Values are possible only because of our ability to nihilate according to Sartre. Our ability to nihilate is our ability to see a lack. We can then imagine circumstances differently. Having imagined ourselves in different circumstances, we can place a value on those different circumstances. Returning to Sartre’s example of Tim, the worker, we can understand that Tim dislikes his job when he recognizes that his situation could be different. Tim first must withdraw from his situation and recognize that his life could be different. He can only make this withdrawal because of his ability to nihilate. Sartre argues that Tim can “posit an ideal state of affairs as a pure present nothingness.” That is, he can imagine a future where he works someplace else. He can then place a value on this future. He can decide that this imagined future is more valuable than his present situation. Tim’s value of this imagined future is possible only because of his ability to nihilate (imagine this future that he does not have now). Furthermore, his valuing of the imagined situation is subjective. The value of his imagined situation is not valuable in-itself, and likewise the disvalue of his present situation is not valueless in-itself. The situation is valuable or valueless only to Tim depending on his higher ends or goals. Tim chooses to place value on the imagined situation. If Tim had different projects, he might place value on his current situation and not on his imagined situation.

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124 Ibid., 76, original emphasis.
125 Ibid., 562, original emphasis.
Sartre also maintains that we can always change values. He explains, “The possibility of overturning the scale of values appears complementarily as my possibility.” It may be difficult to change our values because values are hierarchal and tied together with our projects. Thus, to change our values presupposes changing our ends and goals in life. However, we are completely free, and we can always choose differently. In Sartre’s hiking example, he argues that he could have chosen to keep walking even though he was suffering his fatigue, but that would have resulted in a change in the way he views the world. We are capable of changing our values, but to do so is to change our view of the world, and this change is not something that comes easily to human beings.

Sartre explains that changing our view of the world and recognizing that we can choose different values is difficult because we are already thrown into our situation in the world. He explains this through an example of the bourgeois calling themselves respectable citizens:

From the moment of their arising in the world they are thrown into a pattern of behavior the meaning of which is respectability. Thus respectability acquires a being; it is not put into question. Values are sown on my path as thousands of little demands, like the signs which order us to keep off the grass.  

Human beings do not enter into the world as fully rational beings that understand that they must choose their own values and projects. Instead, we are thrown into a world and develop slowly. We acquire a pattern of behavior, and we are in a situation already. We have already adopted values and projects. Thus, even to question these values is difficult for us because we view our values as already having an independent and prior being. They are just present in us. To change our values involves first questioning them and then deciding to change our view of the world.

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126 Ibid., 76. Original emphasis.
127 Ibid., 77.
However, we are not outside of these values, looking in at them objectively. They already belong to who we are. Changing our values involves changing a totality that already has meaning for us.

When we follow this behavior and these values we were thrown into, we are still choosing ourselves. That is, we have still chosen our own projects freely; we just may not recognize that we have chosen them freely. Sartre argues that we will not recognize that our values are subjective until we withdraw from our situation:

But as soon the enterprise is held at a distance from me, as soon as I am referred to myself because I must await myself in the future, then I discover myself suddenly as the one who gives its meaning to the alarm clock, the one who by a signboard forbids himself to walk on a flower bed or on the lawn, the one from whom the boss’s order borrows its urgency, the one who decides the interest of the book which he is writing, the one finally who makes the values exist in order to determine his action by their demands. I emerge alone and in anguish confronting the unique and original project which constitutes my being; all the barriers, all the guard rails collapse, nihilated by the consciousness of my freedom.128

When we withdraw from everyday life and recognize that we are not the self we will be in the future, we realize that we are completely free. We realize that we are not chained to a certain set of values. We are the ones who have chosen our projects and thus have placed meaning on our values. The alarm clock has no meaning or value in-itself. It is valuable to me because I value getting to work on time. I value getting to work on time because I value my job, and so on. All the things we value, we value because we have freely chosen too, not because they have any value outside of us.

128 Ibid., 77.
Furthermore, Sartre describes value as a wrenching away from ourselves towards nothing. He argues, “The meaning of being for value is that it is that toward which a being surpasses its being; every value-oriented act is a wrenching away from its own being toward—.”  

That is, value is future oriented. I value the alarm clock because it will get me to work on time. I value what the alarm clock will do for me in the future. Sartre also holds, “In all cases of lack value is ‘the lacked’; it is not ‘the lacking.’” In other words, in cases of lack, we do not value something because it is lacking, but we value what is lacked. Detmer explains what Sartre means by valuing being a lack as, “our experience of values is of that which is not that case, but which should be the case.” For instance, I may be unhealthy and value health. This is a case of lack. I lack health. It is not the case that I have health. However, I think it should be the case that I have health. Thus, health is a value for me.

We can also see how value is a lack and how it is a wrenching away from being toward a nothing in Sartre’s worker example. Tim, the worker, imagines a better work situation. Thus, Tim recognizes the lack in the situation he is in within his own job. That is, he may lack money or being treated well by his employer or safe conditions. He in turn values his imagined work situation. His imagined work situation then, could consist of a higher salary, being treated well, or safe conditions. Value is the lack of what he has, and it is towards something else. But that “something else” is a nothing because it is a lack. Tim needs to distance himself from his current situation. He needs to take a step back or wrench away from his being and consider his current  

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129 Ibid., 144.
130 Ibid.
131 Detmer, 144, original emphasis.
132 Detmer later argues that Sartre’s understanding of value is incorrect here. He explains that we do value things that are not lacks. Detmer presents the example of a baseball team. He imagines that he is the team manager of a baseball team that just won the World Series and the most important players’ contracts are up. He re-signs the players because he values them and wants to keep them on the team. He argues that this is a case where we value something which is not a lack. However, the situation he is in is a lack because Detmer lacks the contracts of the players. He values keeping the players for another year and to do this needs signed contracts from them, which he does not have. Thus, he lacks the contracts that he values.
situation. Once he does this wrenching away, he is able to imagine a better situation. He then values this imagined situation. Thus, his value is towards a nothing. It is towards a future with this imagined situation.

Furthermore, Detmer argues that Sartre accepts a hierarchy within people’s projects and values. He writes, “It is also important to realize that I have many projects, that these projects are hierarchically related to one another, and that values arise from these different projects in different ways.”\(^\text{133}\) For Sartre, our highest substantive value may be life, and from this top tier value, I can choose projects. Then, from my main projects, I can choose other projects and values from both my value of life and also from my projects. For example, I value eating lunch. However, I do not value eating lunch in itself. This value comes from my projects. That is, I value living, and to live I need to be healthy. To be healthy I need nutrition. I need to eat lunch for the sake of nutrition. Thus, I have a hierarchy of ends that I find valuable. These ends come from my highest substantive value which is living. We can also look at an example from Sartre. Sartre presents a situation in which he wants to ride his bike to the next town, but many obstacles may arise which will stop him from doing so. One obstacle that may arise is the sun may be too hot. Sartre argues that the sun being too hot is not the cause of his inability to ride his bike to the next town. Instead, his projects and values are the cause:

If the changes which occur in my environment can involve modifications of my projects, they must be subject to two reservations. First, they can not themselves effect the abandoning of my principal project which, on the contrary, serves to measure their importance. In fact, if they are grasped as the \textit{causes} of my abandoning this or that project, it can only be in the light of a more fundamental project, otherwise they could not

\(^{133}\) Detmer, 151.
be causes since the cause is apprehended by the motivation-consciousness which is itself a free choice of an end.134

Here, Sartre explains that external factors can only cause me to change my project because of projects and values that are higher up in my hierarchy of values. We are completely ontologically free and thus external factors cannot cause my actions. Normally, we would want to say something in the environment, such as the sun being hot, causes us to not ride our bike. However, Sartre claims that it is not the sun itself that is the cause of his not riding his bike. It is his projects and values that are the cause of his not riding his bike. He does not ride his bike, say, because he values his life. This is his highest substantive value and thus his highest project is to live as long as possible. This top tier project drives Sartre to choose second tier projects, one of which may be maintaining a healthy body. From this second tier project of maintaining a healthy body, Sartre chooses values. He chooses to value keeping his body at a normal temperature.

Thus, if Sartre rides his bike when the sun is hot, his body will overheat, so he chooses not to ride his bike when the sun is hot. The sun is not what is causing Sartre not to ride his bike. His values that arise from his second tier project are what are causing him to not ride his bike under the circumstances. In other words, his fundamental project of keeping a healthy body and the values that comes with it are changing his lower tier project of riding his bike to another town. Thus, in this example we can see that Sartre accepts a hierarchal system of projects and values, and that values can both lead to the projects we choose and arise out of projects we choose.

In this chapter, I have explained the important notions in Being and Nothingness that are relevant to this thesis. That is, Sartre’s notions of freedom, projects, and values are important for understanding how freedom as a telos can ground a virtue ethics. In the next chapter, I will

134 Sartre, BN, 649.
describe how these notions determine a Sartrean existential virtue ethics using Detmer’s interpretation of Sartre.
CHAPTER 3

In “Towards an Existential Virtue Ethics,” Davenport points out that Kierkegaard’s philosophy can ground a theory of virtue ethics if we hold authenticity as the human telos. In order to argue that Sartre’s philosophy can ground a theory of virtue ethics, Sartre’s philosophy also needs a telos. In this chapter, I will present Detmer’s interpretation that freedom is the highest value in Sartre’s philosophy. I will then argue that if we accept this interpretation, it is reasonable for freedom as the highest value to be a Sartrean telos, since valuing freedom above everything else should be the goal for each person following this interpretation. I will thus argue that using Detmer’s interpretation Sartre’s philosophy can support a theory of virtue ethics in a similar way as Davenport argues that Kierkegaard’s does. A Sartrean virtue ethics will have freedom as the telos which will entail certain virtues that promote freedom.

A problem arises when we ask whether Sartre’s philosophy can ground a theory of virtue ethics. That is, for Sartre’s philosophy to work in a similar way as Kierkegaard’s with a theory of virtue ethics, the theory needs a telos. A Sartrean virtue ethics needs to present some goal toward which everyone strives. Davenport argues that according to Kierkegaard this goal is authenticity. However, Sartre is well known for his subjectivism of value. Sartre writes, “It follows that my freedom is the unique foundation of values and that nothing, absolutely nothing, justifies me in adopting this or that particular value.” If all value is subjective according to Sartre, how can his philosophy dictate a telos? If we have no justification for our choice of values, how can Sartre claim that we must all strive for some specific goal?

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135 Sartre, BN, 76, original emphasis.
Detmer addresses this problem in *Freedom as a Value*. He argues that Sartre can maintain that humanity strives for a goal, and that goal is freedom as the highest value. Detmer argues that Sartre mistakenly collapses two separate subjective viewpoints on value into one in his philosophy. He argues that two separate doctrines of subjectivity are in Sartre’s work. One is “‘the subjectivity of values’ or ‘the unreality of values’ (an ontological doctrine),” and the second is “‘the subjectivity of value-judgments’ or ‘ethical subjectivism’ (a meta-ethical doctrine).”¹³⁶ The subjectivity of values is the notion that “values do not exist, or, more precisely, that they owe such existence as they have to human consciousness.”¹³⁷ In other words, if we did not exist, nothing would have value. Value does not exist independent of consciousness. The subjectivity of value judgments is the notion that “we can have no knowledge about values, or that we can have only ‘subjective’ knowledge.”¹³⁸ That is, we cannot hold objectively that this value is right or wrong or actually valuable or valueless. Knowledge of value is subjective, so we each decide for ourselves whether something is actually valuable or valueless.

Detmer reads Sartre as arguing for the subjectivity of values and then mistakenly inferring the subjectivity of value judgments. Detmer explains that Sartre considers values as similar to absence or non-being, since he argues that values are also negativities.¹³⁹ In Sartre’s example of Pierre’s absence in the café, his absence is constituted by consciousness, but is also dependent on the actual fact in the world that Pierre is not there. Sartre explains, “Destruction, although coming into being through man, is an *objective fact* and not a thought.”¹⁴⁰ Detmer maintains that value works in the same way for Sartre. The alarm clock’s value for me is created

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¹³⁶ Detmer, 135.
¹³⁷ Ibid., 137, original emphasis.
¹³⁸ Ibid., original emphasis.
¹³⁹ Ibid., 135.
¹⁴⁰ Sartre, BN, 40, original emphasis.
by me, but also depends on objective facts in the world (e.g. that the alarm clock exists). Sartre argues for the ontological subjectivity of values because he claims that the existences of values are subjective. Detmer argues that from this claim Sartre then infers that value judgments must also be subjective. That is, since we create values subjectively, our judgments about value must also be subjective. However, Detmer claims that Sartre is mistaken here and explains how we can accept the subjectivity of values without accepting the subjectivity of value judgments as well.

Detmer argues that it is possible to accept that values are subjective, but to also accept that value judgments are objective. He claims that these two doctrines seem to hold true in our experience. To support this claim he presents an argument by James Rachels. Rachels argues, “We think some things really are good, and others really are bad, in a way that does not depend on how we feel about them.”\(^{141}\) Rachels provides an example of Hitler’s concentration camps to make his point. He explains that we all think Hitler’s concentration camps were evil regardless of feeling. It is a fact that the concentration camps were evil. If you think they were not, you are wrong. Detmer explains that Rachels describes four claims that demonstrate the objectivity of ethics. The first is that there is a difference between what is valued and what is valuable. People can value wrongly, and thus value and ethics cannot be reduced to belief. Second, rightness and wrongness is not founded on our feelings. They are founded in our experience, like facts. Third, moral truths are not always invented, but are sometimes discovered or recognized as well. Fourth, “there are better and worse reasons for believing one thing rather than another in ethics,

and rational criteria and procedures for evaluating and differentiating between competing ethical claims.”142

Detmer maintains that Rachels’s arguments about the objectivity of value judgments seem to reflect our experience. However, people (including Sartre) often think that if we accept the objectivity of our value judgments, then we must also hold that our values objectively exist.143 People often think that if values exist subjectively, then they are created by human beings and thus cannot be considered objectively right or wrong. The problem we are faced with is that to hold that “values … exist on their own in some shadowy world” seems absurd.144

Detmer explains that to solve this problem people have thought that values might be secondary properties, like color. However, this claim also seems absurd because we do not hold that something is good in the same way that we hold it is blue. Detmer claims that a thing’s being good or bad is closer to a comparison property like ‘large’:

When we say that something is blue, we usually do not mean merely that it is blue in comparison to something else, or with respect to other members of its class; rather we are saying something about it which we regard to be true of it irrespective of the particular class as a member of which we might happen to be considering it. Thus, we might appropriately regard “blue,” and other terms which are capable of being applied to objects correctly without consideration of either that particular class to which that object belongs or the particular other objects to which the object in question is to be compared, “property” terms. When we say that something is large, however, we usually do mean

142 Detmer, 139.
143 Ibid.
144 Ibid., 139-40.
that it is large in comparison to something else, or with respect to other members of its class.\footnote{Ibid., 141.}

In other words, if we say that something is blue, we mean that it is blue regardless of what it is or how it is related to other things. However, when we say something is large, we say it is large precisely in relation to something else. Detmer claims that goodness and badness are similar to large, not blue. Color is a secondary property that things have. Largeness on the other hand, is a comparison term and as such is not contained in the thing that we call large. That is, if I call my truck large, I do not mean that my truck somehow has large in it, nor that there is something in it that causes me to perceive it as large. Likewise, when I say my laptop is good, I do not mean that it somehow has ‘good’ in it as an existing property, nor that there is something in it that causes me to perceive it as good. But when I call my laptop black, I do mean that it has some existing property in it that causes me to perceive it as ‘black’. When I say my truck is large and my laptop is good, I mean that in comparison with other trucks or laptops it is large or good. However, my laptop is black regardless of the colors of other laptops. My truck is not large regardless of the size of other trucks but precisely because of the size of other trucks, and likewise with my laptop as good. Large and good are context sensitive, black is not.

Detmer argues that when we say something is large, we also do not consider it simply a feeling. Although large is not something that is out there in the world or in the object we are speaking about as a property, that does not mean that something’s largeness is purely subjective. I can argue that my truck is large based on rational criteria. Detmer holds that goodness and badness are like large in this way. Although goodness is not out there in the object like blue is, that does not mean that we invented it or that something’s being good is based only on our feelings. Goodness can have rational criteria just as large can.
Furthermore, Detmer argues that we actually have these criteria for determining value as we do with determining ‘large.’ He explains that we have different criteria for determining goodness in different cases and we also may have different standards for reasonably determining goodness. He writes, “For example, even when it is appropriate to use roughly the same criteria (e.g., clarity, cogency, accuracy, etc.) in evaluating the papers of beginning and advanced philosophy students, it would be inappropriate to use the same standards.” That is, we have some understanding of how to evaluate goodness in things. We also can somewhat agree on the reasons for these criteria. Thus, Detmer argues that if we hold that values exist subjectively, we do not need to hold that value judgments are purely subjective as well. If I say that Hitler’s concentration camps were bad or evil, I can admit that I have come up with this assessment of value through a discovery from my conscious interaction with the world. I can hold that there is no property bad somehow in the concentration camps, but I can also hold that this value-judgment (bad) is objective in the sense that I have rational criteria for determining it. Considering my truck, I may argue that it is large because it is bigger than many trucks that have been built. I may also argue that Hitler’s concentration camps were bad because they produced a tremendous amount of suffering. In neither of these cases can I come up with exact criteria for what it means to be large or bad, but in both, people can generally agree upon the criteria within a certain range.

According to Detmer, Sartre incorrectly holds that because values are subjective, value judgments are also subjective. Detmer then points out that this understanding of Sartre may make us wonder how Sartre can have an ethics at all. That is, if Sartre accepts that value judgments are subjective, he cannot argue that we should not oppress others. If value judgments are subjective,

146 Ibid., 143.
147 Ibid.
then we each choose what is valuable for us. Thus, I can decide if oppressing others is valuable for me, and do so. However, Detmer writes, “Sartre’s ethical subjectivism does not represent his only, or even his final, word on the subject of ethics.”148 He claims that Sartre can still maintain an ethics because he also has objective strands about value judgments in his work. Therefore, we can accept Sartre’s first position, that values are subjective, but then need to reject his second position that value judgments are subjective and replace this position with his objective position. From here, we can understand freedom as the highest value for Sartre.

Detmer explains that Sartre demonstrates an objectivist viewpoint in many works as well as in interviews. He argues that Sartre rejects moral relativism in What is Literature and then again twenty years later in a conversation with Simone De Beauvoir. Sartre states, “In the moral field I’ve retained one… thing… and that is Good and Evil as absolutes.”149 Detmer claims that when Sartre does display an objectivist point of view, it is most often in reference to freedom. He holds that Sartre shows this point of view in many works including, Being and Nothingness, Existentialism as a Humanism, Critique of Dialectical Reason, as well as in a conversation with De Beauvoir and in his posthumously published work Cahiers pour une morale. For instance, when speaking to De Beauvoir Sartre states:

Essentially, the good is that which is useful to human freedom, that which allows it to give their full value to objects it has realized. Evil is that which is harmful to human freedom, that which holds men out as not being free and which, for example, creates the determinism of the sociologists of a certain period.150

148 Ibid., 177.
150 Ibid., 180.
Further, Detmer points out that in *Existentialism as a Humanism* Sartre holds that man “can will only one thing, and that is freedom as the foundation of all values.” He also maintains that even in the conclusion of *Being and Nothingness*, when Sartre asks if it is possible for “freedom to take itself for a value as the source of all values,” he is urging us to hold freedom as just that. In these first two quotations, it is clear that Sartre describes freedom as an objective criterion for value. One may wonder whether it is too strong to hold that in *Being and Nothingness* Sartre is urging us to accept freedom as the source of all values, since he presents this as a question. However, I do not think it is unreasonable to interpret Sartre with Detmer as putting forth an idea to, at the very least, investigate in the future. Sartre will later express this idea as a statement rather than a question, as we can see with Sartre’s statements about freedom in his later works. If Detmer’s interpretation of Sartre’s notion of freedom as an objective good is correct, then this notion of freedom will entail not only valuing my own freedom, but the freedom of all human beings. Thus, any ethics that we derive from this notion must promote the freedom of everyone.

Detmer argues that although we can observe that Sartre has objective strands in being committed to freedom throughout his philosophy, an ethic of freedom from Sartre still seems vague. Detmer points out that Risieri Frondizi asks, “Freedom for what?” when considering freedom as the highest value for Sartre. However, Detmer replies to this question by answering: freedom for fulfilling human needs. He claims that it is clear in *Critique of Dialectical Reason* that human need becomes important for Sartre, but even in *Being and Nothingness*...
Nothingness Sartre often describes facticity as limiting human wants. That is, we can see the start of this idea of fulfilling human needs with freedom in Sartre’s acknowledgement of limitations on human beings in *Being and Nothingness*. Detmer argues that Sartre recognizes a universal human condition which we can observe when he writes, “What men have in common is not a ‘nature’ but a condition, that is an ensemble of limits and restrictions: the inevitability of death, the necessity of working for a living, of living in a world already inhabited by other men.”

Every human being is limited and restricted by factors we cannot control. Further, Detmer explains that fulfilling human needs is a moral concern for Sartre. Sartre writes, “What I have is yours, and what you have is mine, and if I am in need, you give to me, and if you are in need, I give to you. That is the future of morality.” According to Detmer Sartre holds that freedom is the highest value, that human beings have universal condition because of our limitations, and that fulfilling human needs is an important moral concern.

Next, Detmer describes how freedom as the highest value can fit with Sartre’s moral concern about human needs. Detmer presents a passage from the introduction of *Les Temps Modernes* which he thinks demonstrates this connection:

Such is man as we conceive him: a total man. Totally committed and totally free. However, it is this free man who must be delivered, by widening his possibilities of choice. In certain situations, there is only room for one alternative, one term of which is death. It must be so that man can choose life, in any circumstances.

Detmer argues that we can see three important points in this passage. First, we can see Sartre’s distinction between ontological freedom and practical freedom. That is, Sartre describes man as

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158 Ibid., original emphasis.
totally free (ontologically free) and also limited in certain situations (practically unfree). Second, the passage “invokes *quantitative* criteria in evaluating one’s freedom in a situation.” Our freedom is limited quantitatively in some situations because the number of choices we can make is reduced. Sartre states that we may have only one alternative. Third, “the passage also invokes *qualitative* criteria in evaluating practical freedom.” Our freedom is limited qualitatively in some situations when the alternatives are all bad. Sartre states we may only be capable of choosing death. If my alternatives are to die of starvation or to commit suicide, my alternatives are qualitatively bad. Thus, Sartre claims that life is a qualitatively better choice, and we should all be in a position to choose it.

Detmer explains that the connection between promoting freedom and the fulfillment of human needs is not that between ontological freedom and fulfilling human needs, because we are always completely free ontologically. Thus, in fulfilling human needs we promote practical freedom. He argues that the connection here is “(1) such fulfillment increases the quantity of one’s options, and (2) such fulfillment increases the quality of one’s options.” Therefore, if our needs are fulfilled, we become freer. We become freer quantitatively in the sense that we have more choices. We become freer qualitatively because our lives are better when our needs are fulfilled. Detmer presents an example of an impoverished person in Chicago during the winter. Let’s call this person Jane. Jane must make a decision between heat and food because she cannot afford both. However, a wealthy person, Alex, living in Chicago in the winter can have both heat and food and make a choice about what kind of food he wants. Thus, Alex has his human needs fulfilled and is both quantitatively and qualitatively freer. Alex is quantitatively

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159 Ibid., original emphasis.
160 Ibid., original emphasis.
161 Ibid., 183.
162 Ibid.
freer because he has a lot of alternatives. He can decide if he wants gas heat or electric. He can
decide if he wants filet minion or roast chicken. Jane, on the other hand, has fewer alternatives
because she can decide only between heat or food, not the different sources of heat or different
kinds of food. Alex is qualitatively freer because he has better alternatives. That is, he can
choose between filet minion and roast chicken, both of which have good outcomes. Jane,
however, must choose between being cold and being hungry, both of which have bad outcomes.
Alex has more alternatives with better outcomes, whereas Jane’s alternatives are limited and
poor in outcomes. Further, Alex’s needs are fulfilled because he can attain shelter, warmth,
heath, medical care and so on. Jane’s needs are not fulfilled because she cannot attain all of these
goods. Thus, the more needs we have fulfilled, the more and the better alternatives we will have
and the freer we will be.

Therefore, Detmer interprets Sartre as holding that by fulfilling our human needs we
become freer, and since freedom is the highest value this is what we must do. That is, the more
human needs are fulfilled, the more alternatives we have and the better choices we can make.
This kind of freedom allows us to do more of what we want. Detmer explains that this is what
Sartre means in *Being and Nothingness* when he describes play.\(^{163}\) Sartre argues that in play a
person “sets the value and rules for his acts and consents to play only according to the rules
which he himself has established and defined.”\(^{164}\) Furthermore, he holds that in play the act is not
the goal of play:

The act is not its own goal for itself; neither does its explicit end represent its goal and its
profound meaning; but the function of the act is to make manifest and to present *itself* the

\(^{163}\) Ibid., 185.
\(^{164}\) Sartre, BN, 741.
absolute freedom which is the very being of the person. This particular type of project, which has freedom for its foundation and its goal, deserves a special study.\textsuperscript{165}

Play is a kind of creation of values and rules with the purpose of experiencing absolute freedom. Detmer claims that play is the goal in Sartre’s philosophy. Experiencing absolute freedom or play is what is most valuable according to Sartre, and to do this we must fulfill our human needs. Detmer argues that Sartre deemphasizes play in his later works because he realizes that in order to have the ability to play, we must first fulfill our needs. Thus, Sartre focuses on human needs in his later works so that we can arrive at the point where we can play. Moreover, since freedom is the highest value objectively, we will need to attempt to promote freedom in everyone not just ourselves. We will need to fulfill everyone’s needs and attempt to get everyone to the point where they can play. Thus, we cannot oppress or manipulate others for our own increase of practical freedom.\textsuperscript{166}

I argue that if we accept Detmer’s interpretation of freedom as the highest value according to Sartre, then we can present this notion of freedom as a \textit{telos}. Providing freedom as a \textit{telos} allows Sartre’s philosophy to ground an existential virtue ethics. Thus, in the following I will describe how this kind of Sartrean virtue ethics will work.

Detmer argues that according to Sartre, we need to fulfill human needs in order to achieve play. That is, our goal is to become as free as we possibly can be. Therefore, following Detmer’s interpretation, the \textit{telos} for a Sartrean virtue ethics is to promote practical freedom. Our primary goal for Sartre according to Detmer is to achieve a creative practical freedom called play. However, this goal will not only entail practical freedom, but also ontological freedom. As

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\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., 742.
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\textsuperscript{166} Detmer argues that Sartre’s justification for practical freedom as the highest value is an intuitionist justification. I recognize that this kind of justification may be sketchy. However, dealing with this issue is not something I have space for in this thesis, and I do not have an opinion on it as of yet.
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I mentioned previously, ontological and practical freedom are connected. We cannot have ontological freedom without practical freedom to limit our choices, and we also cannot have practical freedom without ontological freedom to provide us the ability to nihilate which we need in order to make choices. Thus, freedom as a telos in a Sartrean virtue ethics will involve both ontological and practical freedom. We need to be aware of our ontological freedom in order to increase our practical freedom. We are always completely ontologically free, but we can lie to ourselves or ignore our ontological freedom. For instance, a thief comes into a store I am in and holds a gun to the cashier’s head. I may tell myself that the thief is bigger than I am and has a gun. Thus, I have no choice but to stand there helplessly. However, I am always completely ontologically free. So I can choose to do something other than stand there. I can grab a can of tomato soup and hit the thief in the head. I can dive on the gun. I can run out. I have many choices I can make. If I deny that I actually have these choices and ignore my ontological freedom, then I limit my practical freedom as well as others’ practical freedom. In my denial of my ontological freedom, I reduce my ability to meet my needs and others to meet their needs. That is, if the thief shoots the cashier and the cashier dies, the cashier’s life has been ended. The cashier’s practical freedom has been limited. However, if I recognize my ontological freedom I may instead realize that I can choose to hit the thief with a can of tomato soup. I will then be promoting the practical freedom of the cashier. Therefore, a Sartrean teleology, although aiming at acquiring the most practical freedom possible for all people, will also involve recognizing and accepting our ontological freedom.

Furthermore, the nature of human beings is freedom for Sartre. Being human involves striving for the most freedom possible. Sartre argues that what makes us being-for-itself rather than simply being-in-itself is our consciousness’s act of negation. Nihilating allows us to make
choices and thus constitutes our freedom. As I quoted previously, Sartre argues, “Freedom is not a being; it is the being of man—i.e., his nothingness of being.”\(^{167}\) Freedom is what we are because our ability to nihilate is what differentiates us from being-in-itself. Nihilation is the way in which we are free. Thus, if we fail to accept and promote our freedom, we fail as human beings. When we ignore our freedom, we frustrate ourselves by turning against our nature.

In the conclusion of *Being and Nothingness* Sartre argues that human beings generally freely choose the project of becoming God. He writes, “It follows that the various tasks of the for-itself can be made the object of an existential psychoanalysis, for they all aim at producing the missing synthesis of consciousness and being in the form of value or self-cause.”\(^{168}\) That is, human beings want to be self-causes like God. We want to be for-itself in the sense that we want to continue to be free, but we also want to be our own cause. Sartre argues that we want to be “in-itself-for-itself.”\(^{169}\) However, we can never be in-itself-for-itself, because we are freedom and we are not in-itself. We cannot be the foundation of our own being. Sartre holds that our attempt to become God leads to despair.\(^{170}\) Here, we attempt to be other than what we are (freedom), and we are frustrated by this attempt because it will never be realized. If we accept Detmer’s interpretation, then we can see that Sartre holds that the goal for human beings is an increase of practical freedom, which involves our recognition and acceptance of ontological freedom. However, the attempt to be God is to reject our ontological freedom and as such reject our goal and fail as human beings.

However, the Sartrean *telos* is unlike the Aristotelian *telos of eudaimonia*. The Aristotelian *telos* provides us with a mode of living. *Eudaimonia* is a substantive goal. For

\(^{167}\) Ibid., 569, original emphasis.  
\(^{168}\) Ibid., 796.  
\(^{169}\) Ibid., 723.  
\(^{170}\) Ibid., 797.
Aristotle human beings have a function which is rational activity. To be *eudaimon* (flourishing), we need to act in accord with reason and virtue. According to Aristotle, to be *eudaimon*, we need to do the activity that directs our entire lives, and we need to do that activity excellently.

The Sartrean *telos* is not substantive in the way that the Aristotelian *telos* is. The Sartrean *telos* is formal. Freedom is a nihilating activity. The *telos* of freedom allows us to choose who we are. We are able to be whomever we want to be. Freedom as our *telos* constrains or restricts us, rather than providing a guide for how to function well.\(^ {171} \) Seeking and accepting freedom does not inform us how to function in order to live well as a human being. Therefore, freedom as our *telos* presupposes Sartre’s view that existence precedes essence. Sartre explains, “Freedom is existence, and in its existence precedes essence.”\(^ {172} \) Our freedom is what determines us as for-itself and provides us the ability to create a being or character. In other words, we would not be human and would not be able to make choices about how to live without freedom. Thus, the *telos* of seeking the most practical freedom possible still allows us to create our own being.

If we accept freedom as the *telos* for a Sartrean virtue ethics, then we must determine what this *telos* entails. To have a goal of enhancing our practical freedom means that we must first attempt to fulfill our needs. We must be in a position where we can acquire food, water, and shelter. Our needs will also include medical treatment, a safe environment, a social environment, etc. Once we have these essentials, we can then have more creative alternatives about values and our lives. Here, we are in play. For example, if I am homeless and jobless my alternatives are limited. I value food, water and shelter. I choose what I will do during the day so that I can acquire these things. I will most likely eat whatever cheap or free food I can get. My options do not even extend to different kinds of food. That is, if I had an income, I may choose fresh

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\(^ {171} \) Freedom constrains us because freedom as *telos* entails that we do not oppress or manipulate others, thus denying their freedom. I explain this in more detail later in the following.

\(^ {172} \) Ibid., 725.
vegetables over hamburgers from McDonald’s because they are healthier. If I have no income, I will most likely not consider these alternatives. Instead, I value eating over not eating. However, if I am wealthy my options increase greatly. Not only can I choose the value I place on different foods, but I can also choose to meet people from around the world, or study at a prestigious university. Here, I have a greater array of alternatives from which to create value and my life. Thus, freedom as a telos means we must attempt to get out of oppression, fulfill our needs, and eventually make creative choices in our lives. However, it also means that we must not oppress others or hinder their freedom. We must help others to fulfill their needs so they may also reach play and have the ability to make their own creative choices. Detmer argues, “From the claim that freedom is the highest value, it follows that, no matter what I might think or feel about it, I am wrong if I do not act so as to help others to fulfill their needs.”

Likewise, if freedom is the human telos, we need to enhance the freedom of everyone. Enhancing all people’s freedom will require that we do not oppress others.

In order to maintain a Sartrean grounding for an existential virtue ethics, we need to present some examples of fundamental virtues that will follow from freedom as the telos. Fundamental virtues will give an idea of what kind of character we will acquire when seeking freedom. I propose four examples of virtues that will fit a Sartrean virtue ethics: benevolence, creativity, integrity, and honesty.

If freedom is our telos, then the first virtue that will follow from this telos is benevolence. That is, we must promote others’ welfare. If the goal of humanity is enhancing freedom, then we must help others enhance their freedom by not oppressing or obscuring their freedom and by helping them meet their needs. For example, if I am benevolent, I will be generous to others, and

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173 Ibid., 207.
I may give money to a charity or volunteer at a soup kitchen. In being benevolent, I can help people fulfill their needs and reduce oppression.

A second virtue is creativity. The telos of freedom requires that our goal lead to play. In play, we create values and configure our free lives. Therefore, creation and creativity promotes the kind of freedom that is our goal. The goal of freedom is to arrive at a point where we can create freely. To choose value is to be creative because for Sartre, in choosing value in play, we are creating value. In describing play as sport Sartre writes, “In reality sport is a free transformation of the worldly environment into the supporting element of the action. This fact makes it creative like art.”\textsuperscript{174} In play we create values and rules, and as such we change the in-itself and appropriate it to ourselves. This choice of values and rules is creative. Thus, we need to be creative in order to make choices or be free. To clarify this idea we can return to the example of the wealthy person. If I am wealthy, I can create who I am and choose my values. I can decide to value travel over studying, in which case, I place value on, say meeting new people, discovering new cultures, rather than learning physics. By choosing travel over study, I am creating the person I will be. This creative choice is play.

A third virtue is integrity. That is, we need to have some sort of coherence or structure to ourselves in order to promote freedom. Enhancing freedom does not entail random choice. Random choice is incompatible with a coherent life in pursuit of a hierarchy of ends. Randomly choosing in order to express our freedom will not lead to the enhancement of freedom because freedom involves choosing a value. In order for us to enhance our freedom, we need to have a hierarchal system of values. As I explained in chapter two, we choose our highest substantive values, (e.g. life or living) and from these projects, other values for the sake of those projects

\textsuperscript{174} Sartre, BN, 742.
We need to value in order to make a choice. Thus, being ontologically free is choosing these ultimate ends which determine our human projects. Freedom will also constrain my ultimate substantive values because I should choose only values that will not limit my or other’s freedom and will actually promote freedom.

Furthermore, to pursue these projects (which is our goal), we need practical freedom. We can acquire practical freedom only by having integrity because integrity entails that we stick to our values. That is, we value, make a choice based on that value, and to obtain that value we need to keep our other choices coherent with that value. Thus, if we have integrity of character, we will keep our choices and values coherent and be more capable of achieving our projects. We need integrity (i.e. coherence or structure of our character) to be practically free. Therefore, enhancing practical freedom will involve integrity.

For example, living is one of my ultimate goals. If I do not have integrity, I will make choices that are opposed to my ultimate goal. That is, I may eat unhealthy foods and never exercise. I will then have an unhealthy body, and I may die at a young age. My unhealthy lifestyle then frustrates my ultimate substantive goal, which is living. The lack of integrity frustrates my practical freedom because I cannot obtain my ultimate goal. If, on the other hand, I have integrity, I will eat healthy and exercise. My healthy lifestyle will support a longer life, thus promoting my ability to obtain my goal. Therefore, having integrity is important for enhancing freedom.

\[175\] Freedom is our telos and highest goal. However, freedom is a formal goal whereas the values that determine our projects are substantive goals. Thus, we can have highest goals that we create which are substantive and still have freedom as our telos.
The fourth virtue is honesty. In order to enhance freedom, we must be honest with ourselves as well as others. Sartre describes bad faith as a sort of lying to ourselves. In this lie, we flee our ontological freedom because we pretend to be something we are not. Bad faith hinders our ontological freedom rather than enhances it because bad faith is an attempt to ignore our freedom. As I argued previously, since ontological freedom and practical freedom are connected, in order to enhance our practical freedom we cannot lie to ourselves about being ontologically free. We need to accept that we are ontologically free. That is, we need to be honest with ourselves. If we lie to ourselves about our ontological freedom, we can both restrict our own alternatives and oppress others.

For example, I am a college student sitting in class. I tell myself that I have to be in this class. I have no choice. Here, I am not acknowledging my freedom. I always have the freedom to leave the class. In lying to myself about this freedom, I reduce my alternatives because I do not accept that they are even available to me. I could leave the class and do any number of things. I could get lunch or go to the beach or write a novel. However, since I am fleeing my freedom, I ignore my alternatives and thus reduce my freedom. Lying to myself can also lead to my oppression of others. For example, I am working at a clothing store. My manager, Bob, tells me not to sell clothing to homosexuals. I in turn, I tell myself that I must go along with what my manager tells me. I do not have a choice since it is his store. Here, ignoring my freedom leads to my oppression of others.

Furthermore, to have honesty as a virtue means I must be honest with others. Lying to others also can compromise their freedom because lying to another is to impose one’s will on the

\[176\] Ibid., 87. Sartre argues that we are essentially a synthesis of facticity and transcendence. That is, we are a synthesis of our body, our past, and our situation as well as our striving to be what we are not. Sartre argues that in fleeing from our freedom, we are trying to either escape our facticity by being in only transcendence or escape our transcendence by being only in facticity. This fleeing from our freedom is bad faith.
other. If I lie to my friend, Brittaney, I can make the option I want her to choose seem more appealing to her. Say Brittaney and I live together in an apartment and I want a new puppy. Brittaney tells me she does not have time to help take care of a puppy. I lie to Brittaney and tell her that I have the time to take care of the puppy myself and she will not need to participate. However, I know that I do not have the time, but if I get a puppy, I know that Brittaney will help take care of it, so I lie. Brittaney then agrees to get a puppy. I have deformed Brittaney’s options. If Brittaney has the choice to either get a new puppy and take care of it or not get a puppy at all, she will choose to not get a puppy at all. However, if Brittaney is forced to choose between taking care of a puppy which she already has and abandoning it, she will take care of it. Therefore, Brittaney now has qualitatively poorer alternatives because of my lie to her.

Therefore, if we accept Detmer’s interpretation of Sartre, we will accept that practical freedom is objectively the highest value for humanity. That is, we value gaining the most practical freedom possible in order to reach a state of play. A state of play is one where we can creatively choose many different values and rules to live by. To create grounding for an existential virtue ethics using Detmer’s interpretation, practical freedom as the highest value becomes the telos for human beings. Increasing our practical freedom will also involve recognizing and accepting our ontological freedom. Furthermore, freedom as the human telos entails that we attempt to promote everyone’s freedom and not oppress others. Thus, our highest substantive values will be constrained by freedom. We should only choose values that do not oppress others and promote freedom for everyone. I have proposed four virtues that will follow from a Sartrean virtue ethics of this type are benevolence, creativity, integrity, and honesty. These four virtues will promote practical freedom and as such will not oppress others.
CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I attempt to defend the possibility of an existential virtue ethics. I maintain that existentialism and virtue ethics are not antagonistic theories. Instead, they have some important similarities and can be interconnected in a way to create a viable ethics. Specifically, I look at David Detmer’s interpretation of the existential philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre in combination with Alasdair MacIntyre’s theory of virtue ethics. I follow John J. Davenport’s article, “Towards an Existential Virtue Ethics: Kierkegaard and MacIntyre,” substituting a Sartrean existentialism for a Kierkegaardian one in Davenport’s argument form.

In chapter one, I present important points from Davenport’s “Towards an Existential Virtue ethics” in order to set up my argument and provide key insights as to why existentialism and virtue ethics can cohere. First, I explain Davenport’s claim that although existentialism and virtue ethics appear incompatible, they are not so. Existentialism and virtue ethics seem incompatible because of misrepresentations of the two. That is, common misrepresentations of existentialism expound a theory of arbitrary radical freedom, and view existentialism as being so concerned with the individual that the community is unimportant. Common misrepresentations of virtue ethics, on the other hand, is see it as expressing an ethical theory that has no regard for the freedom of the individual and hold that the individual is solely created by social relations. Davenport argues that both of these viewpoints are mistaken. He claims that both existentialism and virtue ethics are reactions to the ideas of freedom and control of libertarian ideology of the time. Next, Davenport provides five areas of agreement between Kierkegaard and MacIntyre to
show that Kierkegaard’s existentialism has some similarities with a MacIntyre’s virtue ethics. He explains that the two agree (1) that a person’s whole life and motivations should be taken as the primary subject of ethics, (2) that being an ethical agent will entail a life of narrative unity, (3) Neither Kierkegaard nor MacIntyre are consequentialist, (4) both accept that some of our character traits are habits and evaluative attitudes we learned in childhood, and (5) both agree that virtues of character are connected to the attainment of the highest human good. Davenport then argues that a Kierkegaardian virtue ethics will have a telos of authenticity. Consequently, his philosophy coheres with an important aspect of a theory of virtue ethics. Furthermore, freedom of disposition and earnest willing follow from this telos and can add an important aspect of human life to MacIntyre’s virtue ethics. Finally, Davenport explains that Kierkegaard can help MacIntyre’s virtue ethics and MacIntyre can help Kierkegaard’s theory of authenticity. That is, MacIntyre does not provide a reason for human beings to care about goods internal to practices, but Kierkegaard’s notion of authenticity entails that we care about our choices. Thus, Kierkegaard’s notion of authenticity can provide this reason to care about internal goods. MacIntyre can help Kierkegaard by providing an argument for why we cannot be inauthentic but still care about our commitments. MacIntyre argues that if we have commitments to goods internal to practices, we must accept the objectivity of ethics. Accepting this objectivity so as to attain internal goods is being authentic. Thus, we cannot be authentic unless we are committed to internal goods.

In chapter two, I describe three important notions in Sartre’s existential philosophy in Being and Nothingness. These notions give a basis on which to describe what a Sartrean virtue ethics would look like. In order to understand a Sartrean virtue ethics, we need to discuss Sartre’s notions of freedom, projects or end goals, and value. Freedom is the ability of consciousness to
nihilate and project value onto that nihilation. There are two kinds of freedom in Being and Nothingness: (1) ontological freedom—the freedom to choose, and (2) practical freedom—the freedom to obtain. Projects or end goals are the substantive ends we choose because of our values. We value certain things such as life, health, creativity, and so on. From these values, we choose substantive ends. For example, all people who are living now have chosen life. We value life and so living is one of our ends. From this value, other ends follow. These ends produce more ends and values. Thus, for Sartre we have a hierarchal system of values and ends. These ends make us who we are. They create our character. They are difficult to change because changing them involves changing our already unified perspective of the world. Values are the things we choose that we think of as good. Thus, value is bound up both in freedom and projects. We value our nihilations, and our ends come from these values. We can always change our values because we choose them. Nothing external can force me to change my values.

In chapter three, I describe David Detmer’s interpretation of freedom as the highest value for Sartre. I then use this interpretation to present a Sartrean telos and the virtue that will follow from this telos, thus showing that a Sartrean virtue ethics is possible. First, I explain that Detmer argues that although Sartre has subjectivist claims in his philosophy, he also has objectivist claims as well. Further, Detmer argues that Sartre holds that since values are subjective, value judgments must also be subjective, but this in incorrect according to Detmer. Sartre can hold both that values are created and that value judgments are objective. He claims that value judgments are like comparative qualities such as ‘large.’ ‘Large’ is subjective in the sense that it depends on other large things, but also objective in the sense that we have rational criteria to demonstrate what is ‘large.’ ‘Good’ works in the same way according to Detmer. Thus, it is consistent to argue that values are subjective while value judgments are objective. Next, Detmer
holds that if we accept the objectivist strain in Sartre’s philosophy, then Sartre promotes freedom as the highest value. Freedom as the highest value is the idea that we should gain as much practical freedom as possible. Increasing practical freedom will involve fulfilling needs.

According to Detmer, Sartre holds that when our practical freedom is limited our alternatives are limited and our outcomes are poor. However, if we fulfill our needs, we increase our alternatives and have better outcomes, thus increasing our practical freedom. Freedom as the highest value will entail fulfilling the needs of all human beings because freedom as the telos is the goal to promote freedom as such. If we do not fulfill all human needs, then we are not promoting freedom. Next, I argue that if we accept Detmer’s interpretation of Sartre, then in creating a Sartrean virtue ethics, freedom is the telos. Following Detmer’s theory of freedom as a telos then, we must be as free as possible. Being as practically free as possible is our goal. However, I argue, unlike Detmer, that this kind of telos will involve both practical and ontological freedom because one involves the other. That is, we need to be able to nihilate in order to have practical freedom (i.e. the ability to attain our preferred outcomes), and we need to be practically limited in order to have ontological freedom (make choices). Thus, our telos will involve recognizing our ontological freedom while increasing our practical freedom. That is, in having freedom as the telos we do not aim at acquiring everything we want immediately because this is not being free. Instead, we aim at having more alternatives with better outcomes. Furthermore, freedom as the telos will entail that we do not oppress or manipulate other people because then we will deform their freedom. Finally, I provide four examples of virtues which I think will follow from freedom as the telos: (1) benevolence, (2) creativity, (3) integrity, and (4) honesty. We must be benevolent because benevolence entails helping others and thus increasing their freedom. We must be creative because making choices involves creativity and thus increases freedom. We
must have integrity because choosing involves valuing and our values will fit into a unity. Thus, to achieve our values, we need to be coherent in our choices (i.e. have integrity). We must be honest with ourselves and others because promoting freedom entails recognizing that we have freedom and not lying or manipulating others to suppress their freedom.

Davenport’s “Towards an Existential Virtue Ethics” shows that one way Kierkegaard’s philosophy can cohere with MacIntyre’s virtue ethics is through the telos of authenticity. Similarly, one way to argue that Sartre’s philosophy can ground a MacIntyrean virtue ethics is to show that Sartre can have a teleology, and present the virtues that will follow from such a teleology. I attempt to show that such a teleology is possible with Sartre’s philosophy in this thesis. To continue following Davenport’s approach and show how grounding an existential virtue ethics with Sartre and MacIntyre is valuable, I will need to show how Sartre’s existentialism and MacIntyre’s virtue ethics can help each other. I think it is possible that each theory can aid the other in the same way that Davenport argues Kierkegaard’s and MacIntyre’s theories aid each other. That is, Sartre’s notion of freedom can give an explanation for caring about goods internal to practices. Being free entails that we care about our choices. If we didn’t care about our choices, then they would be arbitrary and we would not be free. We have to value nihilations in order to be free. Furthermore, MacIntyre can provide an argument for why caring about our choices entails accepting the objective authority of ethics. This argument can provide Sartre with a justification for the objectivity of ethics. If we care about our choices, we should hold the objectivity of ethics because we cannot be committed to our choices without being moral. Furthermore, I will need to look into areas of agreement between Sartre and MacIntyre. I look forward to exploring these issues in the future.
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