# Existenz and Nothingness
## Jaspers and Sartre on the Ontology of Truth

Dane Sawyer

*University of La Verne, California*

dsawyer@laverne.edu

**Abstract:** Jean-Paul Sartre and Karl Jaspers, who diverge on many topics, are two complementary and insightful thinkers who successfully address the differences between willful and necessary ignorance. Both argue that necessary ignorance is a fundamental feature of the human condition, with Sartre emphasizing the importance of freedom and responsibility, oftentimes by resting his analysis on the gloomier and grim side regarding an ontology of truth. In his unpublished and posthumous work *Truth and Existence*, Sartre sheds light on the various ways that individuals aim to avoid, negate, or distort the truth for the sake of personal interests, as well as to evade responsibility for one's choices. However, according to Jaspers, Sartre's text suffers from a lack of systematic attention to his various positions and concepts. By dividing truth into its various modes within the Encompassing, Jaspers more suitably captures and communicates some of the insights and views that Sartre had tried to espouse in *Truth and Existence*. Both Sartre and Jaspers advocate that the important factor in encountering truth is not so much the actual truth one can discover, but the attitude one takes towards that truth, notably, an open acceptance and authentic response to it, one that embraces, seeks, and appropriates the truth with integrity and responsibility.

**Keywords:** Sartre, Jean-Paul; Jaspers, Karl; willful ignorance; necessary ignorance; bad faith; *Existenz*; ontology of truth; truth; existentialism; authenticity.

On the popular American television sitcom, *Seinfeld*, one of the characters, George Costanza, gives a memorable piece of advice, just before the lead character Jerry faces a lie detector test, "Jerry, just remember. It's not a lie…if you believe it."[1] This sentiment expresses an everyday example of the philosophical gray area between willful and necessary ignorance, between the honesty of a statement and its accuracy. On the one hand, one cannot know all there is to know, yet, on the other hand, the purposeful aversion, denial, or obfuscation of truth, possibly for one's own economic, social, or political gain, but also simply as a psychological coping mechanism (a product of the—sometimes—desperate attempt or need to avoid uncomfortable, unsettling, or upsetting truths) is an undeniable reality for humans. In addition, murkiness often surrounds the search for and the expression of truth. For instance, social reality regarding truth is frequently a mere means to draw political alliances, reinforce social tribalism, and to manipulate data or facts for one's political or social agendas—an endeavor or point of reference that Sartre and Jaspers would both find as inauthentic, even repugnant.

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[1] Jerry Seinfeld Episode 102, *The Beard (February 9, 1995)*, http://www.seinfeldscripts.com/TheBeard.htm, last accessed March 18, 2019.

In my estimation, Karl Jaspers rightfully highlights the perspectival nature and complexity of truth, taking note that, in what he calls "the Encompassing," truth is divided into its various modes of existence, consciousness-in-general, and spirit. Jaspers describes the first mode of the Encompassing as existence (*Dasein*), which is embodied by our empirical, day-to-day lived experience and is primarily manifested in one's concrete engagement with life, projects, tasks, and others. The second mode of the Encompassing, consciousness-in-general (*Bewußtsein überhaupt*), describes the realm of what is often referred to in common vernacular as objective or universal truths—those truths associated with logic, mathematics, and scientific knowledge. The truths in this mode are public and verifiable. The third mode of the Encompassing, spirit (*Geist*), expresses the whole of the human experience as it is understood in terms of unities, that is, as concrete universals based on the historical and contextual situation of one's own and a community's existence. As Jaspers states, it is "the totality of intelligible thought, action, and feeling—a totality which is not a closed object for knowledge."[2] In other words, spirit operates through existence and consciousness-in-general to make grander claims and statements regarding the situation in which one finds oneself and one's place in the larger cosmos. Examples of this mode include art, ethnic or cultural traditions, political systems, and religion.

Jaspers harmonizes the fact that truth is dependent on the lens and purpose through which one investigates it, and the fact that there are multiple factors that contribute to what makes a particular act, claim, or method correct or useful. Still, what makes something true or right is subject to the conflict, according to Jaspers, between the exception and the authority. He states, "The exception, by its actuality, destroys permanent and universally valid truth. And authority, by its actuality, fetters every particular truth claiming absolute autonomy."[3] The idea of an exception has both positive and negative potential outcomes, as exceptional cases and people certainly exist, but also, at the same time, any person, movement, or group could effectively—under the guide of inauthenticity or bad faith—conceptualize itself as an exception, thereby justifying its own truth, regardless of whether that perspective is actually grounded in existence, consciousness-in-general, or spirit. Authority, on the other hand, signals for Jaspers the unity of truth as it is conceptualized in a historical context, and for the person who lives by it. In that sense, authority's historical character is constantly in tension and in motion with exception, and the strain between such frictions often discloses the darker, psychological, and existential sides of epistemology: the intentional avoidance of distressing or unsettling truths. In what might be labeled a form of the "fallacy of uniqueness" or simply a search for exoneration, people often seek those opinions and mediums that confirm their beliefs or prejudices rather than inform their beliefs, or simply rationalize behavior that otherwise would be considered indecent, imprudent, or down-right unethical. In what follows, Jaspers' concept of *Existenz* and Sartre's notion of bad faith is treated side-by-side to arrive at an outline for an ontology of truth.

Sartre never published a formal epistemology, but an unpublished manuscript touching upon this topic surfaced posthumously and has been published under the title *Truth and Existence*.[4] In the introduction, the editor, Ronald Aronson, states that it was written, in part, as a response to Martin Heidegger's *Essence of Truth*, but Sartre's analysis is less an epistemology and more an ontology of truth meant to address ethical issues surrounding freedom, action, and self-deception (*STE* ix). In short, Sartre offers his readers an ethics of truth.

In *Truth and Existence*, Sartre focuses largely on the French concept *ignorer*, a term that can mean "not knowing," but may also connote a sense of "avoiding knowledge," either through indifference or intention. The English terms "ignorance" and "ignoring" are linked etymologically in part to the French *ignorer* and capture the dual nature of ignorance that Sartre attempts to differentiate. Ignorance in the sense of not knowing is a condition of human existence and cannot be avoided (Sartre labels it "necessary ignorance"), while ignorance in the sense of ignoring and avoiding knowledge (a kind of "willful ignorance") involves an intentional and volitional act on the part of the person. In other words, Sartre focuses largely on what in English we would call "ignoring" the truth as a means to illuminate the

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[2]   Karl Jaspers, *Reason and Existenz*, transl. William Earle, Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press 1997, p. 57. [Henceforth cited as *JRE*]

[3]   Karl Jaspers, *Philosophy of Existence*, transl. Richard F. Grabau, Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press 1971, p. 44. [Henceforth cited as *JPE*]

[4]   Jean-Paul Sartre, *Truth and Existence*, transl. Adrian van den Hoven, Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1992. [Henceforth cited as *STE*]

ways in which we intentionally or purposefully avoid or hide certain truths about the world and ourselves, thus highlighting another form of bad faith that he had spelled out in *Being and Nothingness*. Sartre states,

> since the truth is illumination through an act and the act is choice, I must decide the truth and want it; therefore I am able to not want it. The condition of there being truth is the perpetual possibility of refusing it. [*STE* 27]

In short, truth and error are made possible through human affirmation or negation, both of which are expressions of our fundamental freedom as human beings. Sartre writes, "truth is my possibility awaiting me…To say that I do not know is to say that I am aware that I can know, that is, the world is *already* knowable" (*STE* 19). For Sartre, we are not merely responsible for the acts we commit but also for the acts we do not commit, as we choose one path or project over another. For Sartre, coming face-to-face with this fact is one step toward living an authentic life, whereby I recognize that by ignoring one area of life or the world in favor of another, I am making a choice that reflects my priorities, and thus if I choose to pay no attention to certain truths, whether about myself or the world, I am—at least in some sense—responsible for that choice. According to Sartre, pleading innocence through ignorance does not excuse or justify one's behavior in many cases.

Like Jaspers, Sartre also conceives of knowledge as a product of intersubjectivity. In particular, knowledge for its own sake, says Sartre, reveals two dimensions about the human condition. First, since consciousness is intentional and always about something, its very nature is to unveil the objects of the world (what Sartre calls the unveiling of being-in-itself by being-for-itself): "the already known, insofar as it is only this limited unveiling, is an in-itself (object, law) that I recover in the for-itself by transcending it towards a new unveiling" (*STE* 6). To some extent, Sartre and Jaspers share this view of consciousness. For instance, in *Philosophy of Existence*, Jaspers comments on Immanuel Kant's notion of transcendental deduction and writes, "all 'being for us' is an appearance of 'being in itself' as it presents itself to the consciousness-in-general that encompasses all being for us" (*JPE* 20). Sartre's second condition relates to the following: An individual's insights can be communicated or given to others, who can then make them their own, which, in turn, inform their future goals and purposes. Sartre states, "the disclosure enters the rank of signifying object, of indicating object, and

it is then recovered by the sole fact that the indication becomes for the other an instrument that becomes one with his own behavior" (*STE* 6-7). Again, Jaspers describes this situation in similar terms, "we are what we are only through the community of mutually conscious understandings…Truth…cannot be separated from communicability. It only appears in time as a reality-through-communication" (*JRE* 77, 79). In other words, humans enter history at the intersection between the individual and others; perception and judgment are an intertwined and inter-individual phenomenon. Sartre writes that truth

> is the In-itself as it has appeared to a for-itself when its appearance, as subjective, unveils itself to another for-itself as in-itself. And in turn, for me as absolute subject who was the first to unveil, my unveiling, which was purely lived, is given back to me as absolute-object by the other if first of all I give it to him. [*STE* 7]

In this view, truth is both personal and shared, and ultimately these two aspects are inseparable. A similar thought is expressed by Jaspers: "not only factually am I not for myself alone, but I cannot even become myself alone without emerging out of my being for others" (*JRE* 80).

Sartre's rhetoric, terminology, and arguments are convoluted and difficult to clearly categorize in terms of traditional Western philosophical views concerning the nature of epistemology. One obvious explanation for this obscurity is the fact that *Truth and Existence* was only posthumously published and therefore was never submitted to scrutiny by Sartre for its logical coherence and systematic consistency. In addition, Sartre often rushed his writing and wrote voluminously and on an enormously wide range of topics, which sometimes resulted in not thoroughly worked out positions and arguments, as well as thorough revisions or edits. In other words, Sartre often utilized the phenomenological method as a way to avoid having to entertain some of the argumentation and structuring of arguments that are so prevalent in analytic philosophy. Sartre tended to stay on the side of persuasive description as opposed to argumentation (though, of course, he does offer arguments on occasion in his work). In short, Sartre might not have cared or even been concerned about the tensions in his epistemological framework. Still, the fact that he had never published it suggests he considered it to be a draft; besides, it was also written during a transitional period in his career (similar points can be made about his unpublished *Notebook for an*

*Ethics*, which has also been published posthumously). Nevertheless, his manuscript comprises approximately eighty pages, and there are places where Sartre has shown some attention to edits and comments to his own writing, so he at least reviewed the writing to some extent.

To map out Sartre's epistemology, there are a few potential positions one could consider. Ron Aronson, for instance, highlights in the introduction to *Truth and Existence* that Sartre seems to border on absolute realism, absolute intuitionism, and absolute subjectivism, all simultaneously.[5] In my estimation, however, Sartre is basically in fundamental agreement with Jaspers' overall views that truth is individual (existence), universal (consciousness-in-general), and communal (spirit); Sartre just does not quite have the philosophical vocabulary to make these distinctions as clearly as Jaspers does, and thus he engages in some terminological word-play to make his claims fit the language and ontology of *Being and Nothingness* (*STE* xxii-xxiii). Thus, Aronson has a point that we can find Sartre at times describing perception of an object as if it were simply there, independent of my perception of it, until it is unveiled by us, that is, we are confronted with a form of realism: "The essence of truth is the 'there is' [*il y a*] of 'there is being'" (*STE* 4). In other places, Sartre's language suggests a view more akin to intuitionism, the view that we are directly and immediately aware of an object as an object: "At the level of the *cogito* it becomes useless to speak of truth because we have only *being* (existence)" (*STE* 4). Still, at other times, Sartre borders on subjectivism, or the perspective that knowledge is merely subjective, thereby obfuscating access to any final form of external or objective truth:

> truth is not a logical and universal organization of abstract "truths": it is the totality of Being to the extent that it is manifested as a there is in the historialization of human-reality. [*STE* 50]

Sartre seems to suggest that he can simply embody all of these philosophical views simultaneously without having to clarify how all of these perspectives could somehow cohere together, or even if they can at all. In my assessment, Sartre is aiming to transcend the traditional idealism-realism debate about how one

perceives and engages with the world. As he suggests in *Being and Nothingness*, the debate does not capture the basic features of consciousness, which embodies a direct engagement with the world and the objects in it. In this sense, Sartre agrees with Heidegger that we are beings-in-the-world, a fact that simply cannot be doubted. Yet, our consciousness is colored by our aims, projects, and desires, so that we do not simply see the world as it is "in-itself" but in relation to our subjective and active engagement with the world. There is no perspective-less view of the world, no place to stand outside of existence itself that could allow us to capture the whole; in other words, all truth by its nature is perspectival, but that does not mean it is merely subjective (truths can still be more or less objective, just not boundless and without any sense of horizon or context). Sartre's obvious example is when he describes going into a café looking for his friend, Pierre: Sartre does not see everything in the room but notices the fact that Pierre is not there, a fact that suggests consciousness does more than simply and non-judgmentally observe with bare attention the objects of the world, but nor does it deny that one is not directly conscious of the people and objects in the café as one is surveying it. Still, I readily admit that granting or utilizing this description of Sartre's view does not fully answer the question of where one would place Sartre in terms of traditional epistemological views (other than just stating that he is not playing the same language game), but this limitation should not discourage us from considering Sartre's arguments; rather, Sartre's seeming limitations here actually invite the insights and perspectives of Jaspers at this point as a complement to Sartre's epistemology.

Jaspers, I argue, is better equipped terminologically to explain what Sartre seems to be aiming at epistemologically. As I have stated earlier, Jaspers distinguishes truth into its various modes as they appear within the Encompassing, or "that within which every particular horizon is enclosed as in something absolutely comprehensive which is no longer visible as a horizon at all" (*JRE* 52). In this sense, the Encompassing is not merely the horizon in which all knowledge and experience is made possible, since any horizon signals something further that would surround that given horizon, but, as Richard Grabau highlights in the preface to *Philosophy of Existence*, the Encompassing is the "form of our awareness of being which underlies all our scientific and common-sense knowledge and which is given expression in the myths and rituals of religion" (*JPE* xv). As Jaspers claims, "We always

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5  Ronald Aronson, "Introduction: The Ethics of Truth" in, *Truth and Existence*, ed. Ronald Aronson, Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press 1992, pp. vii-xlii. [Henceforth cited as *AET*]

live, as it were, within a horizon of our knowledge" (*JPE* 17), but that horizon is limited, fragmented, and partial. As a result, the Encompassing is not an actual object of our experience but structures our moods and motivations, emotions, and felt experiences and thoughts. The Encompassing appears in two modes: the world and being itself. In between world and being, humans engage with the world through existence, consciousness-in-general, and spirit, all of which have claim to their own unique form of truth. In the mode of existence, Jaspers claims that truth is individual and pragmatic: "*Truth* is what furthers existence (life), what works; falsity is what harms, limits, paralyzes it" (*JPE* 36). Thus, in the mode of existence, truth enhances and preserves life on an individual level in a way that might not hold once one were to analyze it from a general level, which brings us to the second mode of existence: consciousness-in-general. In this mode, truth is akin to the scientific project, a rational and conceptual understanding of the world that is public and verifiable, universal and objective. As Jaspers states, "It proves itself by evidence" (*JPE* 39); in contrast, existence relies on usefulness in practice. Finally, Jaspers introduces spirit, a third mode of truth in the Encompassing that somewhat synthesizes existence and consciousness-in-general; it is embodied by custom, tradition, organizations, religious institutions, and cultures. Spirit is both universal and concrete—effectively combining existence and consciousness-in-general—for spirit is always manifested holistically and historically. Jaspers writes, "Truth of the spirit exists by virtue of membership in a self-elucidating and self-contained whole" (*JPE* 37). Put slightly differently, "spirit is the totality of intelligible thought, action, and feeling" (*JRE* 57).

All three of these imminent modes of the Encompassing contain their own truths. This means they all interrelate yet are also partial, never being able to fully capture the whole or absolutize themselves as the only valid or sound form of truth. Thus, for Jaspers—and for Sartre—truth is always discovered on the ground of ignorance. In other words, necessary ignorance is a part of our very condition as human beings; in fact, necessary ignorance is what makes truth possible on this account, as well as what also makes it possible for us to have three separate modes of truth, none of which can claim an ultimately superior position in relation to the other two: "In our research we move about within the encompassing that we are by making our existence in an object for ourselves, acting upon it

and manipulating it; but as we do this it must at the same time let us know that we never have it in hand" (*JPE* 23). Willful ignorance, for Jaspers, will be reserved for the transcendent modes of the Encompassing: *Existenz* and transcendence (a topic that is addressed anon).

Sartre spends much of *Truth and Existence* discussing the internal links between ignorance and knowledge, focusing most of his attention on willful ignorance and the last quarter of the text on necessary ignorance. His driving aim in this text is similar to many of his early psychological writings: Shine light on the various realms of the human condition as active expressions of human freedom. As Aronson states, "Sartre's goal is to transform apparent passivity into activity, states into acts: to reveal human choice, freedom, and spontaneity at the center of psychology and ontology" (*AET* xv). On the one hand, Sartre wants to argue that we willfully ignore and avoid the truth; on the other hand, the human condition is one of ignorance; our knowledge of the world and ourselves is simply limited. The question, then, for Sartre, is: How does one move from the view that ignorance is the necessary condition of all knowledge to the idea that one chooses to ignore knowledge and reality?

Sartre locates his answer within the human psychological capacity for anticipation. In *Being and Nothingness*, he describes humans as acting toward what is not yet, that is, human aims and goals transcend towards realizing projects, regardless whether these are simply future states of being or one's attempts to shape or manipulate future outcomes in order to suit one's interests or objectives. Thus, through the constant psychological state of anticipation, the world is revealed to us based on one's preferences and expectations. Anticipation, Sartre argues, "functions as a measure and guiding schema of vision" (*STE* 22). In a profound sense, says Sartre, "I create what is" (*STE* 22). Thus, traditions contribute greatly to what will be revealed as true; if one changes the tradition, this amounts to changing the truth and the experience. Sartre writes, "in changing their traditions they will change their experience. We can look directly at an object and not see it if it is not given in a perspective that is part of behavior" (*STE* 19-20). In other words, anticipation is an active disposition and not passive contemplation or observation. For instance, "Persuaded that that something is a tree," Sartre argues, "I generate the tree on that something, just as Kant insists that to perceive a line is to draw it" (*STE* 22). Sartre's point is that we can carve up the world in a variety of

different ways based on our interests, concerns, and expectations, and these distinctions in some sense create the very world in which we live and navigate. Sartre's view, I think, provides some justification for accepting Jaspers' distinction of truths into various modes, since truth also depends on cultural interests (spirit), on pragmatic interests and concerns (existence), and on what can be thought as logically and objectively possible (consciousness-in-general).

One's conscious ability to anticipate explains what makes error possible and enables the distinction between necessary and willful ignorance. According to Sartre, error is a negative verification of anticipation. He writes, "once the anticipation has been verified it can just as easily return to its nature as anticipation" (*STE* 24). For instance, if I add salt to the food on my plate, I might notice the container to my right as a saltshaker, however, so argues Sartre, "if someone, taking advantage of my not paying attention, has replaced the salt with sugar, the structure of my verifying behavior is not modified" (*STE* 25). In such a situation, truth has transformed into error without fundamentally altering in nature. In short, as soon as one moves from a stance of verifying our anticipations, error becomes a permanent risk. The task of verification, then, becomes a circular and continuous process. In the words of Jaspers: "Reason is always too little when it is enclosed within final and determinate forms, and it is always too much when it appears as a self-sufficient substitute" (*JRE* 66). In my view, Sartre is actually describing here the existence mode of truth for Jaspers, where one's pragmatic concerns dictate the truth of an action or proposition. Jaspers claims:

Truth [in the mode of existence] does not lie in something permanent and already known, or in something knowable, or in something unconditioned; it lies in whatever arises here and now in the immediate situation, and in what results. [*JPE* 37]

Incorporating Jaspers in an attempt to clarify Sartre's position can help to explain Sartre's next move in his argument. Since one's pragmatic concerns are fundamentally and consistently being either satisfied or shown as mistaken, despite the fact that truth also arises on this everyday level, as a consequence, one may choose to reject one's task of unveiling being, which, for Sartre, contradicts one's very existence in the world (what he calls upsurge). One cannot avoid consciously perceiving the world, nor can one escape anticipation being a part of everyday activities; nonetheless one can avoid truth by refusing to anticipate certain possibilities, by denying what is being observed, or by simply

wanting the world and personal reality to be different than they indeed are. In short, the origin of ignorance is prolonged by choice and lying (to others or to oneself).

To dramatize his point, Sartre describes a woman (named "T.") who likely has tuberculosis but refuses to see the doctor. According to Sartre, T.'s fear of the truth is also the fear of her freedom, as the doctor could ease her worries but also verify them. But her visiting the doctor would also transform the possible into a definite, where the tuberculosis might or might not show itself in all its severity, reveal itself through testing and analyses, and bring new meaning to the symptoms that up until now have merely been isolated phenomena (such as fevers, coughs, and so on). Once T. decides not to consult the physician, according to Sartre, she is aiming to "minimize being." Sartre writes:

Since [the tuberculosis] has not been taken into consideration, there is no obligation to deal with it. It would not force T. to choose herself against it, to assume it, to take her responsibilities for being ill with tuberculosis. [*STE* 34]

To verify tuberculosis would also be to create it. As Sartre argues, "in the formula 'to create what is' she insists on the 'to create' and drops the 'is'" (*STE* 34). Sartre's wording suggests that T. prefers to live in a fantasy or imaginative world, and not the world as it is (in the mode of existence). Sartre is by no means denying the importance of creativity or imagination—since these are operating even in most basic interactions with the world—but certainly they can pose a threat to or an escape from encountering reality in its most benign but also most troubling circumstances.

In T.'s case, her willful ignorance is not simply a refusal to understand or see (for instance, as one decides not to see what is unpleasant). Rather, the point is to not destroy being but, as Sartre points out, "to allow it to collapse in its night without intervening, by leaving to it all responsibility for this annihilation" (*STE* 33). Analogously, Sartre compares the woman's actions to a person who allows an enemy to drown without attempting to come to the rescue (passive calamity), as opposed to a person who directly murders an opponent (active calamity). An active calamity is epistemologically similar to simply refusing to understand something unpleasant, just as T.'s actions resemble the washing clean one's hands by claiming innocence. Sartre argues, "It's not I who kills my enemy. He shouldn't have got into the boat; it is his own fault that he died and I wash my hands of it" (*STE* 33). In

other words, ignorance through ignoring the truth is tantamount to letting being collapse, a contradiction of the very nature of consciousness as unveiling being. In this context Sartre concludes, "ignorance itself as a project is a mode of knowledge since, if I want to ignore Being, it is because I affirm that it is knowable" (*STE* 33).

Sartre's fundamental assumption is that consciousness is free to either actively accept its responsibilities or actively evade them. Therefore, the appeal to destiny or fate will not solve T.'s dilemma, for they also embody an attempt to ignore being, as is evident, in Sartre's view, in such common statements as "We must let Nature takes its course," or "If it kills me; it kills me; if I survive; I survive" (*STE* 39). In the case of T., she knows what she ignores, utilizing affirmation, distraction, and forgetfulness as strategies to claim her life rather than to succumb to it. Each individual symptom or experience, for instance, will be lived passively and without anticipation. As Sartre claims, "This cough, this spitting of blood, this fever will be lived for themselves, and since only the anticipatory act allows us to see them, they will not be seen" (*STE* 35). In other words, T. is refusing anticipation, thereby claiming her freedom; she disregards the coughs, conceiving them as instances of "undefined little spasms." In addition, T. may engage in what Sartre calls distraction: "to steadily and constantly illuminate one area in order to leave the rest in the dark" (*STE* 37). In this strategy, T. basically prefers her ability to negate certain aspects of the world in favor of others, that is, focus on something other than the potential problem at hand, a willful tuning out instead of tuning in. Finally, T. can opt for forgetfulness by "letting the symptoms of her sickness plunge into Nothingness, by not totalizing them in the unity of an organic development" (*STE* 37). In other words, T. isolates each individual effect or symptom of tuberculosis, which ultimately point to the existence of the disease, and chooses not to see any of it as being related to one another: "In a word, she wants to forget the possibility of this tuberculosis and to ignore the truth of this tuberculosis in case this truth were realized" (*STE* 40).

A common thread throughout such attempts to evade the actuality of facts is to place oneself in a stance of general indifference to the future, what Sartre calls a denial of one's transcendence (that is, one's ability to overreach any fact that is true for one's beliefs in order to realize anticipated projects). In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre argues that most often bad faith results from a denial of either one of the two facets of the human condition: one's facticity or one's transcendence. The example of T. falls into the denial of the realm of facticity, that is, a rejection of the facts that are true to one's situation. However, also the role that transcendence plays in one's life can be denied. In T.'s case, seeing a doctor was brushed off by engulfing herself in a myriad of tasks. Sartre comments on T.'s strategy to prevent herself from going to the doctor as follows:

> she creates a value system which makes it more important to visit that friend than to go and see the doctor, or instead she is too busy socially; she is not able to go to the doctor, she does not have the time. [*STE* 41]

Such acts of denial are common and find their way into the common vernacular with such statements as "I must," whereas Sartre aptly points out that under many such incidences—though not all, of course—the truth is more comparable to "I want to" or "I do not want to," as opposed to "I have to," or "I must." In short, while we often do not want to admit it to ourselves, the statements "I cannot" or "I must" are often utilized as excuses for the fact that we actually could attend that friend's party, for example, yet we value some other event or commitment more. Sartre harshly and unsympathetically reminds us that such decisions place no commitment or obligation completely out of the bounds of personal choice and responsibility, which include not just the choices we make but also the choices we do not make as a result of choosing one course of action over and against another.

None of the above dismisses the fact that human beings are fundamentally ignorant by nature, in the sense of not knowing. Sartre, sounding much like Jaspers, highlights that "truth always reveals itself against a horizon of ignorance which constitutes its possibilities of development and life" (*STE* 65). In fact, for Sartre, truth appears in three possible ways: "it is my truth [for Jaspers, existence], it is truth that has become for the other [closely to Jaspers' "spirit"]; it is universal truth [for Jaspers, consciousness-in-general]" (*STE* 65). In short, for Sartre, necessary ignorance is once again tied to the freedom of one's consciousness and the one of others through the very fact that one must ignore one part of reality in order to know another part of it, that is, anticipation limits the scope of our investigation and experience, thus determining what kind of truth will be revealed. Sartre writes, "ignorance must inhabit all truth not only as the soil from which Truth draws its origin and can be rediscovered in transcended form as its temporalization…but also as its finitude, as its

shadowy side" (*STE* 59). Similarly, Aronson perceptively points out that necessary ignorance highlights "the fact that much of being necessarily remains in the dark, the other side of the coin" (*AET* xxi). Thus, verification embodies a choice to limit oneself, every fragment or token of knowledge contains its own finitude, and no historical act is capable of viewing itself with the kind of objectivity it hopes for. Sartre writes:

> each truth is simultaneously closed and open. It appears as the presence in person of the In-itself, with a circular horizon of meanings [*significations*] that close the look [*regard*]. And it is simultaneously open insofar as these meanings are not verified but only presumed, and insofar as it remains undetermined what subsequent use the alter ego, and later on *the others*, will therefore make of this truth. [*STE* 64]

Jaspers agrees that truth can only become, and must not stagnate into dogmatism but remain open and communicative. He advises to maintain "a radical openness of the will to communicate in actuality—a will, however, that can never fulfill itself except in an historical moment which, precisely as such, becomes incommunicable" (*JRE* 95). In short, willful denial of truth is a product of the perspectival nature of knowledge and permeates one's search for and embodiment of truth, but also makes truth possible as an expression of human freedom, transcendence, and responsibility. In a sense, the kind of truth we discover is partly the product of what lens or perspective with which we choose to investigate the issue or problem. What Sartre adds to Jaspers on this point is the emphasis on anticipation, and since all forms of truth are related to human engagement with the world in the form of anticipation and reception, Jaspers is right in dividing the human modes of existence into differing modes, each unique to the particular anticipatory purpose at hand. The common misconception is to simply assume there is a singular, universal form of truth that encapsulates all other truths, a point of view that leads to the common division of ideas into the merely subjective or opinion and the objective or factual. Sartre and Jaspers correctly see that this dichotomy is itself based on our prior anticipations and projects, and none of its terms can capture the whole or entirety of the human condition. Hence, one must learn to respect these various modes of knowledge as providing insight into human experience that is simultaneously personal, universal, and informed by culture and ethnicity.

In the end, humans tend to ignore certain truths in order to realize others. As Sartre writes,

> my truth appears on the ground of ignorance of innumerable other truths, and the interiorization of my finitude, or choice, implies that I decide to not know [*ignorer*] in order to know—to not know [*ignorer*] the rest in order to know this. [*STE* 68]

The challenge is not ignorance itself, which is unavoidable, but rather the stance one takes toward reality, which will undoubtedly either reveal or conceal certain truths about oneself and the world. Sartre notices that even one's necessary ignorance is a product of the capacity to freely choose, but the important consideration under investigation is the motivating factors for what one chooses to believe and to ignore, and Sartre pressures us to ask oneself with candid integrity and sincerity why one upholds certain beliefs. In other words, Sartre is emphatically encouraging his readers that they become authentic and take responsibility for their life, signaling another point of contact with Jaspers, who notes that there is an inextricable link between reason and *Existenz*: "Each exists only through the other. They mutually develop one another and find through one another clarity and reality" (*JRE* 68). Without *Existenz*, human lives are fundamentally lacking in integrity, possibility, and authenticity: "Without Transcendence, Existenz becomes sterile, loveless, and demonic defiance… Without reason, Existenz is inactive, sleeping, and as though not there" (*JRE* 68-9). In other words, what one believes, and what one says to oneself and others about the possibilities and lived experiences and choices actually does matter—avoiding or not facing up to truth may close doors with regard to unique and authentic possibilities in life, while at the same time it may also serve as a creative outlet for adding meaning to one's life.

Still, a few lingering questions remain for Sartre: What is the criterion for truth? How do we know we are encountering the truth? Sartre confidently states, truth is "Being as presence" (*STE* 61), a vague and ambiguous statement, for sure. Most likely Aronson is correct with his assessment that Sartre does not mean bare sense perception, "but the more complex and sophisticated process of perception aided by instruments and guided by a theory" (*AET* xxii). For example, Galileo's insights regarding the nature of the solar system likely fall within such a criterion, which utilize evidence from tools not located in perception but are guided by vision and theory—a combination of consciousness-in-general and

spirit in the terminology of Jaspers. However, I repeat that Sartre's concerns are much less epistemological than they are ethical. Whatever Sartre might have had in mind concerning the nature of truth, apparently he sees truth in the context of directly apprehending the world through the unveiling of being by consciousness, that is, as a product of lived human experience. Sartre's writings concerning truth contain sentiments close to Jaspers': reason, guided by authenticity and integrity, marks the appropriate stance toward truth and reality, where in *Existenz* "the self can become genuinely certain of itself" (*JRE* 61). Jaspers elaborates,

> without Existenz, everything seems empty, hollowed out, without ground, fake, because everything has turned into endless masks, mere possibilities, or mere empirical existence. [*JRE* 63]

In other words, rather than avoid the truth or aim to escape it, we must embrace it, seek it, and appropriate it. Consequently, Sartre optimistically praises enjoyment as the proper attitude to truth and being: "To love the true is to enjoy Being" (*STE* 30). He continues:

> To affirm is…to assume the world as if we had created it, to take our place in it, to take the side of Being (to side with things), to make ourselves responsible for the world as if it were our creation. [*STE* 30]

Thus, proof in the epistemological sense is much less about finding the absolute answers with regard to the structure or nature of the universe but rather embodies an authentic attitude toward others, the world, and to oneself. Rather than being fearful of truth and freedom, Sartre presents a case in favor of loving truth and facts, even if these are troublesome, as truth simply embodies

a fundamental relationship to the entirety of existence; to deny it is to effectively choose something other than this life, a kind of otherworldly desire for anything better than it. As in Buddhist ethics, it is prudent to adopt a welcoming stance to whatever life brings, for the avoidance of suffering and the craving for peaceful joy and truth will certainly lead to disappointment. One's very expectations and anticipations will merely be contradicted in the mode of existence; hence, the first noble truth of Buddhism is: life inevitably involves un-satisfactoriness or suffering (*dukkha*). Truth, ultimately, is life-embracing. Aronson correctly claims:

> Proof, if we may use that word, is based on good faith towards Being, the choice to see it; therefore it turns on the will to see Being, to refuse ignorance, and to take responsibility for what we have seen. Beyond this, no proof is necessary, because truth depends on each individual's direct intuition: *il y a*. [*AET* xxv]

Or as Jaspers puts it:

> The purpose of and therefore the meaning of a philosophical idea is not the cognition of an object, but rather an alteration of our consciousness of Being and of our inner attitude towards things. [*JRE* 75]

How does one achieve such a stance toward truth and *Existenz*? One remains open to creating possibilities, and one never writes oneself off as simply a confluence of forces, as Jaspers states forcefully: "preserve the open space of the Encompassing! Do not lose yourself in what is merely known! Do not let yourself become separated from Transcendence" (*JRE* 75). Sartre would agree with this stance.