

# Crippled by Psychological Forces

by [Kenneth Francis](#) (May 2025)



The Atheist Viewing the Dead Body of his Wife (Alfred B. Clayton)

**Most atheists who I have** met in my life, or read about, were/are usually people who have not studied the Bible or philosophy (I mean *analyse* the former, hermeneutically, contextually, and historically. One can now use Google Translate for difficult passages for the Hebrew/Greek interpretations).

These atheists are also hostile to belief in God because it is in collision with their world view and lifestyles. In other words, many are crippled by psychological forces on an

ontological issue.

Paradoxically, there are also many believers in God who do not study the Bible, but believe in God existentially: He is written across their hearts and minds and His presence is paramount to their existence. Such belief is called Fideism, or 'properly basic' belief.

The great American Catholic bishop, and 1950s' TV host, Fulton Sheen, said: "Atheism is not the knowledge that God does not exist, but only the wish that He did not, in order that one could sin without reproach or exalt one's ego without challenge. The pillars upon which atheism mounts are sensuality and pride."

Is it any wonder that occultist Aleister Crowley was, and still is, so popular amongst hedonistic, promiscuous celebrities and rock stars, when his Thelema motto is: "Do what thou wilt."

I am not arguing that atheism is psychologically determined. There are various reasons why some people accept or reject God but psychological needs are so prevalent, especially regarding moral autonomy, lust, or the children of defective father figures.

New York University psychology professor, Paul Vitz, said: "Let's look into the lives of leading atheists and sceptics in the past. What do they have in common? The result is interesting: virtually all of these leading figures lacked a positive fatherly role model—or had no father at all."

Regarding some intellectuals who do not believe in God, they are usually torn by both psychological and ontological factors that confuse their mental states. One good example of this was the French Existentialist philosopher/novelist, Jean-Paul-Sarte (1905-1980).

Sartre's father died when he was 15 months old. Throughout

much of his adult life, he mentions fathers, and denigrates fatherhood. This would point to a psychological aspect of Sartre's disdain for God. But to be fair to him, he also hinted at ontological reasons, despite being philosophically flawed.

In his most famous work of fiction, *Nausea*, Sartre wrote about the existential despair of the terror of existence. This book is about a writer who becomes a psychological wreck in his absurd world without meaning.

Published in 1938, it tells the story of Antoine Roquentin, who returns to France after many years travelling to do some research and write a diary. However, a change has occurred in Roquentin's thoughts, and his perception of the external world becomes freakish. He is crippled psychologically by existence, and is almost void of phenomenological scrutiny, to live a normal life with the rules to 'play the game'.

He feels this change in his life like a strange illness that seems to be progressing; a kind of heightened intellectual vertigo leading to a feeling of nausea. Here Roquentin reflects:

*A little while ago, just as I was coming into my room, I stopped short because I felt in my hand a cold object which held my attention through a sort of personality.*

*I opened my hand, looked: I was simply holding the doorknob. This morning in the library, when the Self Taught Man came to say good morning to me, it took me ten seconds to recognise him. I saw an unknown face, barely a face. Then there was his hand like a fat worm in my hand. I dropped it almost immediately and the arm fell back flabbily.*

He says that there are a great number of suspicious noises in the streets, too. Here we have a deeply confused man with a disordered soul in a world he likely believes is void of God and the moral order. Appearance and reality in the external world, are, for Roquentin, in a dark state of flux.

He is a man who now perceives things similar to how an alien from a different galaxy might see them on arrival to earth. He feels like he is in a matrix where everything has become magnified and uncanny, tinged with a feeling of nausea.

Few of us are acutely aware of opening a door handle, or perceiving the origin of the furniture around us in a domestic setting: Tables, chairs and doors made from felled trees; pots and pans derived from underground minerals, etc. We take them all for granted. But when we cease to see such objects in their ordinary states, Sartre referred to those situations as 'curious moments.'

On first sight and beyond, we see things in the external world in a phenomenological way (we see the sun rise and set, but not the earth tilting). When putting the kettle on to make a cup tea, it is done so as we can look forward to drinking the tea. We don't think of boiling the H<sub>2</sub>O till the molecules move around and exceed the strength of the hydrogen bonds between the molecules, causing them to separate from the other molecules in order to increase the thermal energy to a heat point of 100C (212F).

What kind of person ponders over the intermolecular bonds breaking up as the heat increases the kinetic energy of the system, causing the molecules of the water vapor to move faster with the temperature increasing?

But back to the character Roquentin. More than likely, *Nausea* was autobiographical. Sartre was a hardboiled atheist and, despite being a popular philosopher, his vision of a Godless world was highly perceptive, but ultimately flawed.

As for Roquentin's crisis and search for freedom from insanity, that is tragic, albeit the struggle of a fictitious character. His predicament is a kind of solipsism, where his consciousness interacts with images in a hyper-awareness state. In this Hell, there are not only other people, but a perceiver struggling to normalise reality.

At one point in the novel, Roquentin's descent into the maelstrom of despair worsens. He enters a public park which leads onto a beach. He says: "The ocean is green; that white speck up there is a seagull, but I didn't feel that it existed or that the seagull was an 'existing seagull'; usually existence hides itself. It is there, around us, in us, it is us; you can't say two words without mentioning it, but you can never touch it. When I believed I was thinking about it, I must believe I was thinking of nothing, my head was empty, or there was just one word in my head, the word 'to be.'"

For someone lost in this Hell on Earth, the sea belongs to the class of green slimy objects under the surface, its colour a quality of the ocean. Living in the now, things look like collapsed scenery to such a person trapped in curious episodes. Raw existence had unveiled itself to Roquentin.

For those afflicted with Roquentin's condition, our worldly order and everyday objects disappear into the abyss of the grotesque. Torn away from the phenomenological beautiful scenery of reality, the sea becomes an enormous swamp, beneath which, high mountains and dark valleys filled with hideous creatures devour each other every second of every hour of every day.

Roquentin might be free and experience 'being', but the burden of responsibility of existential freedom is overwhelming. This psychological-philosophical dilemma is the result of faulty thinking and a Godless worldview. A theatre of the absurd is exactly that: absurd. That's not to say some theists in their darkest periods of doubt don't experience curious, nausea

moments.

The human condition, being what it is, is vulnerable to all sorts of spiritual moments of philosophical reflection. But where there's a way out for the believer in God, and not just based on wishful thinking or blind faith, the only exit for the existentialist is to 'create' one's world or, in blind despair, commit the fatal unthinkable.

If the amoral universe really is just a brute fact, which is scientifically and theistically absurd, then Roquentin's worldview is unliveable unless he gets 'creative.'

In such a Godless world, streets and houses become geometric blocks and plains with cement-shaped objects of all shapes and sizes. The sound of Mozart's 'Requiem' would be nothing more than the primate jungle auditory observations of a hairless ape in a suit or skirt: vibrations in the air hitting the outer ear then middle ear, transduced into nerve impulses, then ... well, the rest are vibrations, molecules, and sound-wave frequency.

Is it any wonder the Existentialists were such a miserable bunch? And is it any wonder that Albert Camus, in deep despair before dying in a car crash, allegedly reached out for the sanity of Christian normalcy?

But back to music: It would be nothing more than a noisy racket that the atoms in a brain obey due to the fixed laws of chemistry. Void of God and phenomenology, even the literature and information we read every day would be no more than billions of black, meaningless squiggles on components derived from felled trees and/or computer software, and not in the sense of an English-speaking person reading Chinese visa versa; but in the sense of a spider walking across a page of Hamlet, experiencing the physical imagery but not its meaning.

Is there no exit from this nightmare? Sartre believes there is. He is against what he calls 'bad faith' and instead

encourages one to become 'authentic.' Sartre's long-term partner, Simone de Beauvoir, echoed this in her feminist book, *The Second Sex*.

I remember watching a documentary on TV many years ago, where a Godless prostitute was being interviewed in San Francisco. What struck me about this well-dressed, conservative-looking woman who spoke like an academic, was her reason for the lifestyle she chose.

Sitting in her fancy apartment office, she frequently used the term 'authentic' when talking about what motivated her sordid lifestyle. I could not read the titles on the books behind her back on the shelf, but I bet *The Second Sex* or some work by Sartre were bound to be amongst some volumes. Crippled by psychological forces, ontological proofs were off limits for that 'lady of the night.' She was obviously crippled by psychological forces.

## [Table of Contents](#)

**Kenneth Francis** is a Contributing Editor at *New English Review*. For the past 30 years, he has worked as an editor in various publications, as well as a university lecturer in journalism. He also holds an MA in Theology and is the author of [\*The Little Book of God, Mind, Cosmos and Truth\*](#), [\*The Terror of Existence: From Ecclesiastes to Theatre of the Absurd\*](#) (with Theodore Dalrymple), and [\*Neither Trumpets Nor Violins\*](#) (with Theodore Dalrymple and Samuel Hux). His most recent books are [\*Theology in Music: How Christian Themes Permeate Classic Songs\*](#) and [\*Theology in Film: How Christian Themes Permeate Classic Movies\*](#).

Follow NER on Twitter [\*\*@NERIconoclast\*\*](#)