

Prompt chosen: It's not doubt that is toxic to faith; it's silence

Doubt and Silence, Faith and Apathy

Doubt is an integral part of the human psyche, serving as both a basis for the production of knowledge and a precursor to curiosity, holding the inherent ability to inspire and empower. The ability of humans to question the beliefs perpetuated socially through their communities, as well as the internal values shaped through fundamental truths they have learned to accept, profoundly influences the cognitive faith that an individual possesses. Specifically, doubt questions the fundamental truths of reality, whether through religion or through metaphysics. In slight contrast, however, internal and external silence, as a result of social judgement and the abuse of religious authority to quell individual autonomy, presents a dilemma whereby the ignorant adopts a silent stance towards matters of faith, perpetuating their lack of knowledge, while the wise risk their social standing, their dignity, and honor, to communicate their doubts. "Ignorance is bliss", and Galileo was burned at the stake metaphorically for supporting the Heliocentric stance diametrically opposed by the Catholic theocratic governance. This displays a stark dichotomy between the ignorance of silence, and the danger of doubt. Thus, doubt encourages both the deepening of faith and the opportunity for change, while silence inherently opposes it.

Firstly, doubt is a medium for cultivating faith, serving as an inherent and integral part of the human experience. In the Myth of Pandora, Pandora disobeys direct orders to open the box she was forbidden to reveal and so, brought diseases and curses into the world. It is not only the cognitive doubt of the Gods' orders that encouraged Pandora, but rather, the curiosity of disobedience. Pandora is arguably one of the most "human" humans. Her curiosity, disobedience, and subtle rebellion against the Gods through her actions intimately reflect her human nature, creating a compelling archetype that resonates universally, with Carl Jung later developing a Pandora archetype through his psychological theories of shadows and the psyche. Curiosity is a precursor to doubt, as only those who feel the physical and mental attachment to this world will feel the inclination to question the nature of the world. Furthermore, Pandora opened the box in truth to seek the knowledge of what the box holds, to satisfy her thirst for forbidden knowledge. Therefore, doubt fundamentally stems from care and curiosity towards the world, as a crucial part of the human experience, which bolsters the pursuit of knowledge. Similarly, in *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard argues that Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac is through his faith in God: that God will not allow his innocent child to die; his faith is in a merciful God. Specifically, he postulates the overbearing doubt that Abraham must have felt accompanying Isaac on the three-day trip up the mountain, the unease, and the cognitive dissonance between what God demands of him and what his faith dictates to him about the inherent nature of God. Kierkegaard portrays doubt as an innate quality of the human experience, projecting the doubt onto Abraham in his

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hypothetical re-imagining, but subtly argues that the existence of doubt does not weaken Abraham's faith, but rather, presents a psychologically internal conflict which he resolves by strengthening his faith. When faced with the greatest challenge of all, to sacrifice his own son, the doubt that emerged forces Abraham to hold-fast to his faith, and ultimately amplify the relief when God reveals his nature through the provision of the sacrificial lamb.

In contrast, silence bolsters apathy, a diametric opposite of faith, by obstructing activity and replacing it with passivity, reinforcing the bystander effect, learned helplessness, and the glorification of stupidity. Specifically, in *The Stranger*, Mersault's complete silence, when questioned about his involvement in luring the cheating girlfriend of his devious friend with criminal connections which led to the girlfriend being physically abused, illustrates his complete apathy towards the emotional well-being of others and his participation in life as a bystander. Camus emphasizes the apathy further through the opening line, "Maman died today, or maybe it was yesterday, I don't know...". Thus, Mersault's final confrontation with a priest intent on evangelizing him, where he physically pushes the priest away, shouts at him, and announces the priest's faith in Christianity as a complete "lie", in stark contrast to Mersault's silent first meetings, reveals the intricate role that silence plays in creating a façade of care while masking the apathy that fundamentally opposes faith. The cold detachment of Mersault's apathy and his faithlessness contrasts the curiosity displayed by Pandora and the faith of Abraham, demonstrating the role silence plays in faithlessness through cultivating callousness, detached, apathy. Similarly, Kafka quotes, "I realized I was a fool when I noticed that life was a masquerade, whilst I attended with my real face". Silence promotes the idea of the existence of living as state of masquerade, whereby few, if any, can truly see past the façade. Masquerades communicate an intrinsic absurdity through the tension between the fake and the real, with silence not only being an effective form of the masquerade of life, but also a teleological response towards the increase rise in the glorification of stupidity. In Sartre's *No Exit*, the male character's choice of being silent when trapped in hell with two other woman reveals his acceptance of silence as in opposition of truth and hope, embracing the passivity for activity in a state of learned-helplessness where he is under the constant gaze of the others.