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Prompt: Are we really our true selves when no one else is watching?

An Extramarital Affair

The abundance of the absurdity of living, presents a intricate dichotomy between succumbing to the current of the world and revolting against the absurd. To exist in the physical reality, is to be subjected to its perverse influence and force of perversion. The perfect soul that descends from the Aristotelean World of Forms incarnates into this reality, like an infinite vastness placed into a finite vessel. This process derives a quintessential branch of the human condition: faith in the material and immaterial.

Observing a soul confirms its existence in this reality, and thus, limits it. "To define is to limit", postulates Oscar Wilde in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and through observation, if can be, the soul is rigidly defined. The idea of a "true self" lies in the balance between the "true self" and "false selves". In truth, the possibility of only one, true self, almost like entropy, reflects the inevitable temptation to succumb to "false selves" through a game of probability and chance. A true self can, thus, be defined as the perfect, uncorrupted, uninfluenced soul of a being. To influence, is to corrupt, as influence is the divine act of sharing a portion of one's soul to another. It is a precious, immoral sharing, that alters the other soul through a process of death and rebirth. In a sense, the perception of beauty anchors a subjective experience into the objective reality. All beauty derives from perfection, from the World of Forms, and therefore, the true self is rid of influence, perfect in form, and beautiful in shape.

The absence of an external gaze, be it male or female, or androgynous, like the constant gaze of God, is impossible. To escape God's gaze, is an act of sacrilege, of immense blasphemy; this existential, metaphysical tension manifests in the dissonant psyche of the individual. Faust, the mad scholar who sold his soul to the devil in a beautifully fragile pact, was driven mad under the gaze of God, when his years ended and the devil came to uphold his end of the bargain. Eurydice, feeling the overwhelming gaze of the abyss, turns towards his gaze towards his wife in an act of sacrifice and instinctual love. Cain, overwhelmed by his guilt and the overbearing gaze of God, confesses the murder of his brother. The futility of escaping God's gaze proves an integral part of the human condition, just as the impossibility of defining a perfect soul in an imperfect reality reflects the absurdity of experience.

"I realized I was a fool when I noticed that life was a masquerade, and I wore my true face", Franz Kafka quotes. The disappointment at the façade of society, the artificiality of existing in contemporary times, forced to accommodate the rapid rise of social media and toxic online dating culture, algorithmically fueled political polarization and extremism, and the stripping of capitalistic ideals in a robotic life structure, is an intimately human feeling. Education shifted towards a tool for segmenting populations

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into increasingly specialized sectors; online dating created an accessible medium that rewards efficient, judgements based on materialist and physical factors; political extremism faced amplification and normalization in specific internet bubbles. Similarly, social cohesion and social harmonic theory encourages individuals to conform towards accepted societal norms, behaviours, and mannerisms. Foucault's watch tower analogy communicates the increasing reliance of the current institutions of power, such as governments and civil enforcement of justice, on individual policing as a result of placing them under constant observation. Essentially, the individual regulates their own behaviour due to their feelings of being under a constant gaze. Thus, the "true self" becomes an increasingly elusive ideal that approximates towards unattainability, and Kafka's quote perfectly illustrates the discontent of the individual's true self, in a society where observation is increasingly pervasive.

To exist in this world, is to subject the perfect soul towards corruptive influences. It is akin to the soul committing an extramarital affair with the material world, abandoning its perfection and nobility. To partake in society, to attempt to escape the gaze of God, is a brutal and animalistic abandonment of the perfect, for a short sense of gratification. To seek pleasure in hedonistic pursuit mirrors the disregard for the perfect and beautiful, wiling it in mud. Artistry serves as an idol to those feeling lost, as an outlet for their deepest shame and guilt. In a sense, this mirrors the fall of Lucifer, his descent into imperfection and sin. The adulterous soul thus numbs itself, ignoring the gaze of God and their own conscious. Thus, it is quite clear that the manifestation of a perfect soul in an artificially imperfect world presents teleological struggles, exemplifying a tension between the organic and inorganic.

How then, can the true self manifest? Euphonic temptations of every aspect whispers to the soul, yet a sober individual's psyche seeks to purify it. To cleanse itself of all influence, offers the soul a chance of redemption, of metamorphosis, to return to its teleological state of perfection. Therefore, existence presents itself with a ladder. Maslow's hierarchy illustrates the necessary prerequisites towards the process of self-actualization. The realization of the soul's limitless potential, the translation of the soul's finite corruption back into the infinite perfection, the approximation towards perfection in an asymptotic relationship, harmoniously conjuncts itself in a beautiful yet fragile process of purification. The self-actualization is fragilely balanced between the desire of the psyche to return to perfection, and the limitations of the reality in which it exists. If unresolved, this existential tension presents the duality of succumbing to despair or faith in the immaterial.

Moreover, the power itself must manifest in the individual. Foucault's idea of power-knowledge frames these two concepts as deeply interwoven into both the societal and individual power structures. To gain the strength of will to self-actualize, the knowledge to do so must be garnered, and the strength is cultivated over a period of

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time. Epistemological, scientific, and artistic pursuits serve as mediums in which knowledge flows, creating a current in which individuals actualize their potential.

The process of purifying an individual's soul is synonymous with deep repentance. The uncontrollable factors that forces the soul to go through its experience of adultery which it learns to enjoy does not excuse the soul of its innocence. Ignorance does not save the guilty, and why should it? The affair of the soul must weep before itself, recognizing every hurt that itself has experienced and hating the absurd world for subjecting itself to trauma. Only then, can the healing and purification begin. Essentially, the process of metamorphosis is immensely intimate, offensively intimate, forcing the soul to confront itself. This confrontation is a beautifully introspective reflection of perversion and perfection, artificial and organic, beautiful and maimed, subtly demonstrating the duality of existence, idolatry and repentance, actualization and stagnancy, unchanging and metamorphosizing.