

# Authenticity, Bad Faith, and the Public Self

## A Wittgensteinian-Lutheran Reframing

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### 1. Introduction: The Cultural Idol of Authenticity

**F**EW WORDS CARRY AS MUCH MORAL authority in our cultural moment as the word *authenticity*.<sup>1</sup> To be authentic is to be brave, honest, courageous; it is to be someone who dares to name and live out their “true self,” no matter how costly or disruptive that may be. Entire genres of self-help literature, social media confessionals, and memoirs are structured around this trope: I once lived a life of conformity, but then I discovered who I really was inside, and now I live freely and honestly.<sup>2</sup> The claim to authenticity is our culture’s secular sainthood.

This elevation of authenticity is not morally neutral. To say that someone is authentic is not simply to *describe* them. Rather, it is to *ascribe* virtue, to pronounce them courageous, to grant them moral standing. By contrast, to say that someone is “inauthentic” is to cast them into the shadows, to imply that they are living dishonestly, hypocritically, even cowardly. Authenticity has become the master moral category by which we evaluate a life.<sup>3</sup>

The story usually unfolds according to a predictable pattern. An individual lives for a time in what appears to be stability: career, marriage, family, faith. But beneath the surface, they feel restless, as though some deeper truth about themselves is hidden, unacknowledged, perhaps even repressed. At some point, the tension becomes unbearable. They set out on an inward journey, a quest to peer into themselves and find out who they really are. The language of “self-discovery” dominates: the real me is inside, and it is my task to bring that inner truth into the light of day.

This narrative has particular force when it comes to issues of sexuality. In recent decades, to “discover” one’s true orientation and then to live publicly in light of it has come to be regarded as one of the highest forms of authenticity. The person who says, “For years I lived as though I were straight, but then I realized I am gay,

and now I can finally live authentically,” is praised as brave, as a model for others. To live otherwise—to remain in the marriage, to continue the old life—is cast as repression, inauthenticity, even self-betrayal.<sup>4</sup>

And yet this cultural story rests on a powerful philosophical assumption *that there is in fact such a thing as an inward, hidden essence of the self that can be uncovered through introspection*. Authenticity assumes that the self is like a buried treasure chest, waiting to be opened.<sup>5</sup> It assumes that desires and orientations are not shifting features of a life lived in community but inner facts that can be discovered and named.

In much of contemporary culture, the question of life’s meaning has collapsed into the project of authenticity. To be alive in a “real” sense is taken to mean living in fidelity to one’s inner truth, as though life could be secured by excavating and expressing some hidden essence. Life, in this register, is not measured by its givenness but by its capacity to host and display the authentic self.

Yet this very identification of life with self-expression quietly redefines the ontology of life itself: life becomes self-expansion, a project of interior disclosure. Against this, the claim of faith is stark: *life does not consist in discovering or expanding the self at all, but in being constituted by what stands outside of it—God’s primal intentionality upon us*. This move presses the logic of externalism to its deepest register: just as meaning and knowledge depend upon what lies beyond the self, so too life itself is ontologically grounded not in self-possession but in the ecstatic relation of faith to God.<sup>6</sup>

What if the assumption of self-expansion is wrong? What if the very quest for authenticity, as our culture tells it, is itself a form of self-deception? What if the attempt to discover one’s true inner essence is not an act of courage but, paradoxically, a subtle way of avoiding responsibility?

This essay will argue precisely that. I contend that authenticity, in its contemporary cultural form, is a refined expression of what Jean-Paul Sartre called *bad faith*: a flight from freedom disguised as honesty.<sup>7</sup> The claim to authenticity masks the deeper truth that the self is not an essence hidden within, but rather a reality constituted in relation: before God, before neighbor, within the shared grammars of public life.<sup>8</sup> To live authentically, in the sense our culture celebrates, is to imagine one can escape the weight of responsibility by appealing to a discovered inner truth. But to live *truly*, as both Wittgenstein and Luther will help us see, is to accept that the self is *enacted*, not *discovered*; *relational*, not *hidden*; *ethical*, not merely *expressive*.

To make this case, I will begin with a narrative that captures the drama of authenticity as it plays out in contemporary life. The story of Jill, a woman in a seemingly stable marriage who begins to reflect on her sexuality, will illustrate the cultural script in its most familiar form. Through her eyes, we will see the lure of authenticity and the disruption it brings. From there, we will turn to Wittgenstein’s

critique of the idea of a private language, a critique which destabilizes the very notion that identity can be inwardly discovered. Sartre's analysis of bad faith will deepen the diagnosis, showing how appeals to authenticity can function as evasions of responsibility. Finally, Luther's theology of vocation and the *imago Dei* will offer a constructive alternative, grounding human selfhood not in inward essence but in public responsibility before God and neighbor.

In short, this essay aims to show how we lose ourselves in the very attempt to find ourselves. Authenticity, far from being the highest virtue, can become the subtlest form of dishonesty. The true self is not the one hidden within, waiting to be uncovered, but the one enacted in freedom, vocation, and responsibility. To recover this truth is to reimagine the *imago Dei* itself, not as a private essence but as a communal calling. Only in this reframing can we begin to see what it means, in the deepest sense, to lose ourselves in order to find ourselves.

## 2. The Case Study: Jill's Story

FOR MOST OF HER ADULT LIFE, JILL THOUGHT of herself as ordinary. She had married young to a man she respected and trusted. They had built a life together, a home with children who filled the rooms with laughter, noise, and the kind of exhaustion only parents know. Friends would sometimes joke that Jill and her husband were the steady ones, the couple who seemed unshaken by the storms that rattled others. From the outside, and even from the inside most days, her life appeared whole.

Yet under this ordinariness there began to stir a restlessness she could not name. It came quietly at first, in idle moments, when she scrolled through articles or personal essays online. The stories caught her attention, women who had lived half their lives in heterosexual marriages before realizing, often with a mix of shock and relief, that they were actually gay. These confessions carried a kind of electric charge. Each one was cast as a narrative of courage: I had been living a lie, but then I discovered my true self. At first Jill read them with curiosity, then with unease, and finally with a trembling recognition.

Could it be that she, too, was living a life that only looked stable but was in fact a disguise? Could it be that her real self, long hidden, was something else entirely?

The questions could not be quelled. They settled into her body, into her thoughts. When she sat at the dinner table, listening to her children chatter about school, she would suddenly feel a pang of dislocation: What if I am not who they think I am? When her husband reached across the bed at night, she sometimes felt a distance she could not explain. She began to wonder if the very normalcy of her life was a mask.<sup>9</sup>

This was the beginning of her turmoil, for Jill had absorbed from the culture around her that authenticity was not optional. To live authentically was to live hon-

estly, courageously. To live inauthentically was to live a lie. If she were not living in accordance with her “true self,” then no matter how happy her children seemed or how stable her marriage looked, she was deceiving them all, *and herself most of all*.

Thus, she set out, haltingly at first, on what she thought of as an introspective investigation of her own desires. She began to pay close attention to her longings, to the subtle stirrings of attraction. She asked herself questions in the privacy of her journal: What do I feel when I see this or that? What images linger in my mind? Where do my fantasies lead me? She treated her inner life as a field to be studied, as if careful reflection could reveal the truth of her essence.<sup>10</sup>

Sometimes the answers came with clarity. She noticed that certain images awakened her in ways her marriage no longer did. Other times she felt only confusion, as though her desires were contradictory, shifting, unreliable. But she pressed on, convinced that if she looked closely enough, she could discern the authentic thread that ran beneath the surface.

Eventually her reflections took on a sharper edge. One evening, after weeks of restless rumination, she sought out not only essays but stories, personal confessions of women who had dared to step into same-sex relationships after years of denying themselves. She read their words with mounting intensity, and something inside her seemed to awaken. *Yes, that is me. That is what I feel.*<sup>11</sup>

The discovery both thrilled and terrified her. It thrilled her because it promised clarity after months of turmoil. Yet it also terrified her because of what it might mean for her family. If this was who she really was, then she could not go on as before. To continue her life unchanged would be to live inauthentically, to betray her own truth.

The turmoil deepened. Jill began to notice every gesture, every silence in her marriage, and to read it as confirmation that her authentic self was elsewhere. She found herself dwelling on the thought that she had never fully known who she was until now. She told herself, with growing conviction, that her task was not to preserve appearances but to live honestly.

And so, with the mix of fear and excitement that comes when one stands at the edge of decision, Jill crossed a line. She arranged to meet Ashley, a woman with whom she became acquainted online. Their first encounter was hesitant, almost awkward, but Jill felt a spark that seemed to confirm what she had been suspecting. When, at last, they kissed, Jill felt the thrill of both pleasure and discovery. It was as if the months of turmoil had converged into a single affirmation: *this is who I am*.

The effect was overwhelming. Jill returned home from that meeting with a heart racing, not only from the encounter itself but from the conviction that she had at last uncovered her authentic self. For weeks she had been circling around the possibility, testing it, doubting it. Now she felt she had evidence, confirmation. She had looked inward, she had experimented outward, and the result was unmistakable.

But the discovery did not bring peace; instead, it created a new sense of urgency. If this was who she really was, then she could not keep it hidden. She owed it to herself, and, so she thought, to her family, to tell the truth. She could not go on living a lie.<sup>12</sup>

So, she began to plan her coming out. She rehearsed the words in her mind.<sup>13</sup> She imagined the shock on her husband's face, the tears in her children's eyes, but she steeled herself with the thought that authenticity was worth the cost. Better a painful truth than a comfortable lie. Better honesty than repression. She pictured herself standing before them not as a deceiver but as one finally honest, finally brave.

The day came when she gathered them all in the living room. Her husband sat stiffly, sensing something was wrong. Her children looked at her with curiosity and then dread. She took a breath and said what she had come to believe: "I need to tell you something important. I am not the person you thought I was. I've realized that I'm gay, and I need to live honestly. I can't keep pretending. I love you all, but I must be true to myself."

The room fell silent. Her husband's face went pale. One child began to cry. Another stared, confused and frightened. Jill felt her throat tighten, but she forced herself to go on, repeating the words she had practiced: *I must live authentically*.

Later, when her friend Mary came to comfort the family, she assured them that Jill was doing the right thing. "She's being honest," Mary said gently. "She's finally speaking her truth. It takes courage to be authentic, even when it's painful. You should be proud of her."

For Jill, Mary's words confirmed what she had come to believe: that in leaving her marriage and family, she was not failing them but living up to a higher moral calling. She was being authentic. She was being courageous. She was, in the deepest sense, being ethical.

And yet, as she looked at the faces of her husband and children, Jill could not shake the sense that something was unresolved. While the cultural narrative highlighted her bravery, in the silence of that room, surrounded by pain, she wondered if authenticity alone could bear the weight of what she had done.<sup>14</sup>

### 3. Wittgenstein's Challenge: Private Language and the Impossibility of Authentic Self-Discovery

WHEN JILL'S HUSBAND CALLED PASTOR PAUL, she braced herself for the worst, such as proof texts, rebukes, and urgent pleas for repentance. But Paul surprised her. He sat quietly, listened longer than she expected, and then reached into his weathered satchel,

not for a Bible, but for a curious-looking book: a bilingual edition of *Philosophical Investigations*, Ludwig Wittgenstein's dense and often mystifying final work.

Jill squinted at the cover. "You're going to quote ... Wittgenstein?"

Paul smiled. "Only if you'll indulge me."

He flipped open to a page already covered in pencil marks and small tabs. "Let me ask you something: When you say, 'I've discovered who I really am,' what kind of discovery is that? Did you find a truth like one finds a birth certificate, or was it more like solving a riddle?"

Jill hesitated. "I mean... I looked inward. I reflected. I paid attention to patterns in my life, what attracted me, what lingered. Eventually, it felt like something became clear."

Paul nodded. "I believe you. But Wittgenstein would ask: what do you mean by 'looked inward'? What *kind* of clarity was this? Was it that which Wittgenstein wrote about in §243 of the *Philosophical Investigations*? He describes a private language as one that only a single individual can understand. That is to say, "The words of this language are to refer to what only the speaker can know—to his immediate private sensations."<sup>15</sup>

Paul looked at her gently. "This is the idea he wants to dismantle: that we can construct a meaningful language to describe inner objects that no one else can see, verify, or correct. If that's what your self-discovery is, it may be more fragile than you think."

Jill frowned. It seemed so odd to be thinking about what a philosopher once wrote. With a hint of self-defensiveness, she replied, "But I didn't make it up. I wasn't pretending."

"Wittgenstein isn't accusing you of lying," Paul said. "He's questioning whether we can give meaning to words, like 'gay' or 'true self', based only on internal observation. In §293, he gives his famous *beetle-in-the-box* example." Paul opened the book and read the following words: "Suppose everyone had a box with something in it which we call a 'beetle.' No one can ever look into anyone else's box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at *his* beetle...." Paul continued, "now if 'the thing in the box doesn't belong to the language-game at all, then it would be' irrelevant."<sup>16</sup>

"Do you see the point?" Paul asked. "If everyone uses the same word, 'beetle,' 'identity,' 'orientation,' but no one can verify what anyone else means when using them, then the mental content to which the word relates doesn't matter. It's how the word is used publicly that gives it meaning."

Jill looked unsettled. "So ... are you saying my identity isn't real?"

Paul shook his head. “Not at all. I’m just saying it’s not *hidden*. That’s Wittgenstein’s point. He notes in §435 that the inner is not hidden; it does not have to be inferred. The inner is expressed.<sup>17</sup> Your inner life is real, but it only becomes meaningful, to you or anyone else, as it’s expressed in words, actions, relationships. It is not something *privately discovered*, but rather is something *publicly enacted*.”

Jill sat in silence, wondering about such a strange pastor.

Nonetheless, she returned alone the next day to the church office. Paul handed her a copy of the *Investigations*. “Just read it slowly,” he said, “even if it feels like nonsense at first.”

That evening, curled up with the book and a mug of tea, Jill thought: “If a person is to be able to think, then he must be capable of following a rule.” Then she thought: “This is the paradox: a rule stands there like a signpost. Does the signpost leave no doubt about the way I have to go?”<sup>18</sup>

She reflected. This was how she had treated her feelings—as rules or signposts. If she felt drawn toward certain images, if her fantasies persisted, then surely that *meant something*. Surely those signs pointed to a truth. But Wittgenstein was asking: *What makes a feeling a rule at all?* How do you know you’re following a rule and not just reinterpreting your own impulses with each passing day?

Her journal came to mind, the way she had tracked patterns of desire, longing for a consistent thread. But what she actually found, she now realized, had often been contradictory. Some days she felt certain. Other days she was confused, ambivalent, even guilty. She had chalked it up to fear or repression. But now she wondered: What if the *instability* was not a failure of introspection but a sign that introspection alone could not yield what she had hoped?

Back in Pastor Paul’s study, she voiced this aloud. “So what am I doing, then, when I say, ‘I am gay’? If it’s not a private discovery, what is it?” Paul opened to §507 and noted that Wittgenstein was saying that only within a language-game can a thought have a meaning.<sup>19</sup>

“That’s Wittgenstein’s answer,” he said. “You’re not reporting a private fact. You’re participating in a *public grammar*, one shaped by culture, community, and ethical relationships. Your declaration is not neutral; it carries *implications*.”

“But I wasn’t trying to hurt anyone,” she replied.

“Of course not. But language isn’t neutral. It’s relational. As Stanley Cavell puts it, our relationship to ourselves is intelligible only because of our relationships with others.<sup>20</sup> James K. Smith suggests that words, and the liturgies or narratives we inhabit, do more than describe — they *commit us to worlds*; thus, the names or

identities we adopt (or are given) carry with them real moral obligations, not merely emotional resonances.<sup>21</sup>

But the most disturbing thought for Jill came later. If her own self was not a hidden object but a public enactment, then she had not *discovered* herself, but had merely *acted*. This meant that she was not just a victim of repression or cultural misunderstanding. In claiming that she had discovered her true self, she was an agent, a participant in a larger cultural event or game. Since she was making a significant move in that game, she was therefore *responsible* for the repercussions of that move.

That realization came not like a stone, but like a quiet unfolding: What if there was no essence to discover? What if the language I used gave shape to my sense of self, not because it named something, but because it created a new horizon of action? What if, in trying to escape responsibility, I had only renamed it?

She closed the book and whispered aloud Wittgenstein's words from §293: "If we construe the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of 'object and designation' the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant."<sup>22</sup>

And for the first time, she felt the weight of what it might mean to be free not to name herself from within, but to answer for herself from without.

### 3.1 Objections and Responses

Yet even as Jill began to grasp Wittgenstein's argument, she found herself uneasy. Could it really be true that her deepest sense of self, that which she thought she had discovered, was not a hidden truth but a public act? Her whole journey had been built on the conviction that introspection could yield knowledge. Now, that foundation seemed to tremble. She needed more.

"I know my experience; I still *feel* it," Jill said one afternoon, turning from the page. "This isn't abstract. It's real. I know what I feel. How could anyone else understand it better than I do?"

Paul nodded. "That's the most natural objection. And it's the one Wittgenstein addresses most carefully." He pointed to §580: "An 'inner process' stands in need of outward criteria."<sup>23</sup>

"You do feel something," he continued. "But when you give that feeling a name, e.g., *gay*, 'authentic,' 'true self,' you're not simply describing what's in the box. After all, you're using language you learned from others, and that language gets its *meaning* not from your internal certainty, but from how we use it together. You're not reporting a hidden fact. You're entering a public world."

Jill looked down at her hands and spoke softly, "So even my clearest feelings might not mean what I think they do?"

“They are real,” Paul said, “but their *meaning* depends on the form of life in which they’re expressed.”

“So ... is this just reducing me to behavior?” Jill asked. “Are you saying that all that matters is what I do or say?”

“No,” Paul said gently. “And Wittgenstein isn’t saying that either.”

He turned to §435, and said: “Don’t you see? *Nothing is hidden*. There is not something private.<sup>24</sup> He’s not denying subjectivity, Jill. He’s rejecting the idea that your inner life could be a *private object*, accessible only to you, and yet intelligible through language. Language doesn’t collapse the self into behavior. Rather it is the only thing that makes the self *expressible*. Without public criteria, even the richest inner world would be mute.”

Jill thought of the journal she had kept, how she had wrestled with words, sometimes failing to capture what she meant, sometimes amazed when a phrase seemed to ring true. She realized now that even her own self-understanding had depended on a shared language for her “realizations” to be meaningful at all.

Jill thought for a time and asked, “But don’t we create new language all the time? Don’t personal insights eventually shape public understanding? Don’t the private insights precede the public understanding?”

Paul smiled, turned to §272 and offered this interpretation, “But what if this sensation were something like a private object? Well, then, we’d be tempted to say: if it is private, it cannot be a criterion.”<sup>25</sup>

“New words become meaningful when others can understand them, when they enter a grammar we share. But a truly *private* language, one based on sensations no one else could verify or interpret, wouldn’t work. Even *you* wouldn’t be able to use it meaningfully over time. You’d lose track of whether it meant today what it meant yesterday. Under those conditions, what private insights would be possible for you?”

Jill looked out the window. Her declarations had felt so certain—until they weren’t. The meanings had shifted, even in her own heart. And now she saw why: without shared criteria, even certainty becomes unstable. She grabbed her notebook and a pen and jotted down what she learned.

1. A private language is one that only I can understand because it refers to my inner sensations.<sup>26</sup>
2. But using a word meaningfully requires rules for its correct or incorrect use.<sup>27</sup>
3. And rules require public standards of correctness.<sup>28</sup>
4. Yet, in a private language, no such standards could exist, and thus I am unable to distinguish “I think I’m right” from “I *am* right.”<sup>29</sup>

5. Therefore, a private language is impossible.<sup>30</sup>
6. Furthermore, if language is public, the idea of an ineffable, private “authentic self” collapses, for thinking and stating such a self would have to rely on a private language. Simply put, the self is constituted in shared practices, not hidden away inside ourselves somehow.<sup>31</sup>

After jotting down the points, she added the following about what Pastor Paul had shared:

- *The beetle-in-a-box analogy*: Imagine everyone has a box with a beetle inside, but no one can look in anyone else’s box. Over time, the word “beetle” would be used publicly, regardless of what’s in each box. Thus, the private contents of the box become irrelevant for the term’s meaning. Our private sensations are like beetles in boxes, and thus they cannot anchor meaning.<sup>32</sup>
- *Pain diary problem*: Suppose you keep a diary and every time you feel a certain sensation, you write “S.” But how do you know you’re using “S” consistently? There’s no outside standard to check against, so the idea of “using it correctly” collapses.<sup>33</sup>
- *Impact on the self*: The notion of a hidden “authentic self” assumes there’s a private truth about “who I really am” that only I can access. Wittgenstein’s argument shows that meaning, identity, and selfhood only exist within *public, rule-governed language games*. Thus, the “authentic self” as something private and ineffable is incoherent.<sup>34</sup>

Jill finally realized that if Wittgenstein is correct, then even something as seemingly self-evident as a headache resists being “known” as a fact I privately verify. I do not *know* I have a headache; rather, I simply *have* one.<sup>35</sup> The same logic applies to sexual orientation. To claim I “know” my orientation as a private, inner truth misframes the issue, since the very concepts of “knowing” and “being” are bound up in public language and social practices. Just as the grammar of “headache” depends on shared forms of expression (crying out, wincing, taking aspirin), so too “sexual orientation” takes shape within public language games of desire, identity, and recognition. In this sense, orientation is not a hidden essence to be privately *discovered* but a role *enacted* and understood within a shared linguistic world. Clearly, the self cannot remain in the closet, but it must be coaxed out into the light along with other worldly denizens.

What struck Jill most forcefully, as Paul closed the book, was not how abstract the argument was, but how *concrete*. If her identity was not a private fact but a public expression, then it was not immune to accountability. She was not merely *discovering*; she was also *doing*. She was not a neutral observer of her life but a moral agent shaping its trajectory.

Wittgenstein had not taken away the reality of her feelings. He had revealed their *context*, a context that was never just personal, but always *ethical*. In reflecting again on the self she thought she had found, she whispered aloud the words, “What if there is no such thing?”

And now the question didn’t frighten her. It sobered her. It made room for something deeper than discovery: the responsibility of living a life that is not hidden, but expressed before others, and ultimately before God.

#### 4. Sartre on Bad Faith: Authenticity as Escape

WHILE WITTGENSTEIN HAD UNSETTLED JILL’S belief that identity could be found in solitary introspection, Sartre had moved further in that direction years earlier, shattering the very idea that there is a “true self” waiting to be discovered. For Sartre, what Jill took as a discovery was clearly a *decision*, one for which she was now unavoidably responsible.

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre describes human beings as “condemned to be free.”<sup>36</sup> Unlike objects that have a fixed essence—a paperknife, for instance, is designed for cutting—humans have no predetermined nature. Our existence comes first; we define ourselves later through action and commitment. This is Sartre’s core claim: *existence precedes essence*.

This freedom is not liberating in the therapeutic sense. It is *burdensome*, because we cannot escape it. In every moment, we are shaping who we are through the choices we make. And when we claim to be simply “being ourselves,” we often conceal the fact that we are *fleeing the weight of decision*. Sartre names this self-deception “bad faith” (*mauvaise foi*).

His famous example of the waiter in the café dramatizes this dynamic. The waiter acts as though his role fully defines him, for his movements are precise, his speech rehearsed, his identity absorbed in function. But Sartre insists that he is not merely a waiter. He is *choosing* to be one, and in doing so, he is denying his deeper freedom to become otherwise.<sup>37</sup>

Bad faith, opines Sartre, is not merely lying to others, but is rather a lying to oneself. It is pretending that the self is a fixed object, when in fact it is always an incomplete *project*.

This directly challenges Jill’s claim: “I’ve discovered who I really am.” Sartre would respond, “No, you’ve chosen a way of being, and now you must own it.” Authenticity, for Sartre, means owning one’s radical freedom to become. As he writes in *Existentialism Is a Humanism*: “man is nothing other than what he makes of himself. This is the first principle of existentialism.”<sup>38</sup>

This reframes Jill's act of naming her identity. She may have experienced it as inward revelation, but Sartre would say that this was never about revelation. Rather, it is the espousing of an *ethical commitment*. To say "I am gay" is to take a stand in a public world, not because of an essence one discovers, but because of the freedom one exercises.

Importantly, Sartre does not suggest we create the self arbitrarily. He points out that while we are situated socially, historically, bodily, we are not thereby determined. Accordingly, although we cannot choose the facticity of our circumstances, we are always responsible for what we make of them. To claim otherwise is to slip back into bad faith. As it turns out, the authentic self is not something hidden or waiting to be found. It is that which must be chosen and assumed.<sup>39</sup>

In this sense, Sartre shares Wittgenstein's suspicion of "inner essence" language. Both deny the idea that selfhood can be recovered like an artifact. But whereas Wittgenstein emphasizes the grammars of public meaning, Sartre emphasizes the solitary weight of freedom. He insists that we are never merely expressing a role; we are always enacting a choice. To declare, "I am gay," or "I am Christian," or "I am free," is never a description of an inner object. Rather it is a public, irreversible ethical move.

For Jill, this reading is both liberating and sobering. She cannot hide behind discovery. Her choice has meaning not because it names what is "inside," but because it shapes what comes next. And that means her declaration is not the end of a journey, but the beginning of moral responsibility.

#### 4.1. Heidegger, Sartre, and Authenticity

In *The Transcendence of the Ego* (1936), Sartre argues that the ego is not an internal structure residing at the heart of consciousness but rather an object in the world, apprehended through reflection. Consciousness, for Sartre, is impersonal, non-substantial, and defined by intentionality—it is always consciousness *of* something. He writes, "the Ego is neither formally nor materially *in* consciousness: it is outside, *in the world*. It is a being of the world, like the ego of another."<sup>40</sup>

This radically opposes the Cartesian model, in which the ego is the foundational subject. Sartre contends that consciousness does not require a unifying subject to produce thoughts or actions; rather, it is a spontaneous, self-transparent flow. As such, the ego is not the cause of our mental states or behaviors. It is rather a construct that arises when we reflect upon our experiences. In this sense, Sartre's externalization of the ego echoes what Wittgenstein gestures toward in the *Philosophical Investigations*, that is, that the self is not a hidden metaphysical entity behind experience, but rather a grammatical illusion created by the structure of our language games. What

both thinkers reveal, in different idioms, is that the “authentic self” may be less a reality to be found than a fiction sustained by reflection and linguistic convention.

Sartre’s existentialism, though famously independent, stands in undeniable conversation with Martin Heidegger, whose *Being and Time* deeply influenced Sartre’s ontology.<sup>41</sup> Yet while Sartre places the burden of selfhood on radical freedom, Heidegger locates authenticity in our relation to Being itself.

For Heidegger, most of us live in what he calls inauthenticity (*Uneigentlichkeit*): not through lies or self-deception, but through immersion in the impersonal world of *das Man*, “the they.”<sup>42</sup> In this mode of being, we do what “one does,” say what “they say,” and think what “people think.” This is not necessarily immoral, but simply is the default condition of everyday life. We do not fabricate a false self, but simply never wake up to the fact that our life is ours to live.

It is important to grasp that Heidegger’s notion of authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*) is not about inner discovery or expressive freedom. It is about awakening to our own-most possibility: the fact that we are finite, mortal, and accountable for the shape of our lives.<sup>43</sup> What jolts us out of inauthenticity is not self-exploration, but the anticipation of death (*Sein-zum-Tode*). When we encounter our mortality—not abstractly, but existentially—we are summoned to face our life as a singular task. As Heidegger reminds us, Only the anticipation of death reveals the possibility of an authentic being-a-whole of Dasein.<sup>44</sup>

This is not a call to heroism. Heidegger is not saying that authenticity means total self-determination. Rather, he speaks of resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*), the willingness to stand firm in the face of our thrownness, to claim our situated existence as our own. In authenticity, we do not become the authors of ourselves. We become answerable to being. Clearly, Heidegger’s “authenticity” is consistent with Sartre’s and Wittgenstein’s deflationary account of the self. It has little to do with the notion of an “authentic self” that can be discovered.

Heidegger is thus a co-sojourner with both Wittgenstein and Sartre. Jill had believed that to be authentic was to extract a truth from within. But Heidegger insists that authenticity does not begin in introspection, but rather in confrontation with finitude. Accordingly, Jill cannot “be herself” without facing the reality that she will die, and that no one else can live her life for her. Authenticity is not about self-expression. It is about owning one’s life as a task not to be inherited but undertaken.

Modern culture has absorbed fragments of both Sartre and Heidegger, but it has flattened their depth. The slogans of authenticity—“be true to yourself,” “find your truth,” “you do you”—echo existentialist themes, but they lack their ethical and ontological rigor.<sup>45</sup>

In popular culture, the authentic self is:

- *Preexistent*: It is found within the person.
- *Emotionally confirmed*: One knows one has found it because of inner peace, clarity, or resonance.
- *Liberating*: Being true to oneself is thought to free one from all external norms.
- *Unquestionable*: To challenge this freedom is thought to be an direct attack on one's dignity.

But for Sartre, there is *no essence to find*, but only freedom to be exercised. For Heidegger, there is *no self apart from being*; there is only the call to live one's finite life resolutely. Both thinkers expose the superficiality of the therapeutic self, a self that is grounded in mood, sincerity, or emotional clarity.

What Jill confronts, then, is not just a philosophical critique. It is an existential rebuke. She cannot outsource authenticity to feelings or cultural scripts. She must choose, and in choosing, she must assume responsibility, not only for who she becomes, but for what her becoming means in a shared world.

Jill had believed she was authentic in the cultural sense, for she had discovered her true self and now thought that she was living in consonance with it. But Sartre and Heidegger both suggest otherwise. She was in bad faith, fleeing freedom by hiding behind essence. Real authenticity, if the term can be used at all, lies in owning one's freedom and responsibility, not in uncovering a hidden orientation.

And here Luther will deepen the point. For even Sartre's analysis, bracing though it is, leaves freedom in a kind of void: condemned to be free, responsible but without ground. Luther reframes this existential truth theologically: the self is not condemned but called; freedom is not a burden but a gift; and responsibility is not solitary but relational, lived before God and neighbor. To see this, we must turn from Sartre's *mauvaise foi* to Luther's *imago Dei*.

## 5. Luther on Vocation, Neighbor, and the *Imago Dei*

WHEN JILL UTTERED THE WORDS "I am gay," she believed she was reporting something that had been hidden inside of her all along. The declaration felt like a discovery: as if, after years of confusion, she had excavated a fixed essence buried beneath layers of social convention. She imagined that authenticity meant finding this inner truth and then reshaping her life to match it.

But Pastor Paul's gentle intervention, drawing on Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*, had unsettled her confidence. Wittgenstein had shown that words

cannot secure their meaning by pointing inward, as though each person had a private mental object that only they could observe. Meaning arises only in use, within a shared language-game. If that is so, then Jill's words "I am gay" are not a description of a hidden essence, but a public move within a form of life.

But eight decades ago, Sartre had already shown that any appeal to authenticity is an instance of *mauvaise foi*, an attempt to escape freedom by positing a fixed essence. Accordingly, Sartre leaves freedom hanging in the void: we are *condamnée à être libre*, condemned to be free, responsible but without ground. What Jill really needs is a way of seeing that freedom and responsibility are not alien impositions but the very shape of one's creaturely life before God. Here, Luther's theology of the *imago Dei* provides just such a reframing.

In much of contemporary culture, the question of life's meaning has collapsed into the project of authenticity. To be alive in a "real" sense is taken to mean living in fidelity to one's inner truth, as though life could be secured by excavating and expressing some hidden essence. Life, in this register, is not measured by its givenness but by its capacity to host and display the authentic self. Yet this very identification of life with self-expression quietly redefines the ontology of life itself: life becomes self-expansion, a project of interior disclosure.

For Luther, however, the self is not a repository of hidden faculties waiting to be disclosed. To see this, we must examine what Luther believes the image of God is. He writes:

Moreover, the remaining doctors in general follow Augustine, who keeps Aristotle's classification: that the image of God is the powers of the soul – memory, the mind or intellect, and the will. These three, they say, comprise the image of God which is in all men.<sup>46</sup>

Luther points here to the traditional view of the *imago Dei* being defined by the properties that human beings *have*. But this is absurd, thinks Luther, for if this defined the *imago Dei*, Satan would have it fully:

I am afraid that since the loss of this image through sin we cannot understand it to any extent. Memory, will, and mind we have indeed; but they are most depraved and most seriously weakened, yes, to put it more clearly, they are utterly leprous and unclean. If these powers are the image of God, it will also follow that Satan was created according to the image of God, since he surely has these natural endowments, such as memory and a very superior intellect and a most determined will, to a far higher degree than we have them.<sup>47</sup>

Were these powers to be the *imago Dei*, they would be leprous and unclean. Instead, the image of God is a unique work of God in human beings: "Therefore, the image

of God is something far different, namely, a unique work of God.”<sup>48</sup> To have this image is to be ecstatically replete with the true and perfect knowledge of God, the highest love of God, eternal life, eternal joy, eternal security. It is to be ruled by God, just as we rule over the other creatures. The image now lost is available dimly through faith:

But what we say about it is taught by faith and the Word, which, as it were from afar, reveal that glory of the divine image. Just as heaven and earth in the beginning were like formless bodies before light was added, so too the godly now possess within themselves a rough outline of that image, which God will perfect on the last day in those who have believed the Word.<sup>49</sup>

In other words, the divine image is not an essence to be discovered but a relation to be lived. The human is in the image of God by standing rightly before God. Just as Wittgenstein denies that there can be a private language, Luther denies that the self can be constituted by a hidden inner essence that can in some way *correspond* to what God is.

Luther pointed this out in his 1519 *Two Kinds of Righteousness*: “This is the righteousness of Christ by which he justifies through faith.”<sup>50</sup> This means that righteousness does not inhere essentially in the soul, but it is a relation to God; for it is received from God through grace and mercy. This righteousness, precisely because it is alien, is the very righteousness by which the believer stands before God. Luther writes: “Through faith in Christ, therefore, Christ’s righteousness becomes our righteousness and all that he has becomes ours; rather, he himself becomes our righteousness. . . . This is an infinite righteousness, and one that swallows up all sins in a moment, for it is impossible that sin should exist in Christ. On the contrary, he who trusts in Christ exists in Christ; he is one with Christ, having the same righteousness as he.”<sup>51</sup>

This move presses the logic of externalism to its deepest register: just as meaning and knowledge depend upon what lies beyond the self, so too life itself is ontologically grounded not in self-possession but in the ecstatic relation of faith to God.

Luther’s language of vocation makes this relational anthropology concrete. For him, the Christian life moves in two directions. *Coram Deo*, before God, the believer is justified by faith alone, entirely passive and dependent. *Coram hominibus*, before human beings, the believer is active in love, called into service of neighbor in the ordinary structures of life. Luther’s paradoxical formulation in *The Freedom of a Christian* captures this double movement: “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.”<sup>52</sup>

This freedom is not the modern freedom of authenticity, the liberty to express an inner truth. It is freedom from sin and from self-justification, and therefore freedom

for the neighbor. In this sense, freedom is never an inward possession but always a public reality. Like Wittgenstein's dictum, "*Die Bedeutung eines Wortes ist sein Gebrauch in der Sprache*" ("the meaning of a word is its use in the language"), so too freedom and selfhood are not hidden contents but enacted realities.<sup>53</sup> To say "I am free" is not to name an inner essence but to take up a role within a public drama, to live in a particular grammar of faith and love.

The implications for Jill's crisis are profound. She had believed that her discovery of an inward orientation released her from the responsibilities of her marriage and family. But if Luther is right, then her authentic self is not a kernel buried within, waiting to be expressed, but is rather her actual life before God and neighbor. Her "true self" is not something she might discover through introspection but something she must enact through faith and love.

In this light, her appeal to authenticity begins to look suspiciously like what Sartre called bad faith. By positing an inner essence—"this is who I really am"—she attempts to escape the anguish of freedom and the weight of responsibility. She imagines that her orientation dictates her action, relieving her of responsibility for her husband and children. But in fact, she remains free and responsible; her situation is ethical all the way down. Luther sharpens this point: vocation binds her to her family, not as a chain, but as the very place where her freedom is lived out in service.

Luther's exposition of Genesis makes the point even sharper. He describes the image of God in Adam and Eve:

In the remaining creatures God is recognized as by His footprints; but in the human being, especially in Adam, He is truly recognized, because in him there is such wisdom, justice, and knowledge of all things, that he may rightly be called a world in miniature.<sup>54</sup>

In other words, man is a *rational living being*.

These are not inward properties like orientation or disposition, but rather are modes of relation, ways of standing rightly before God. The image of God is never a private essence but always a relational reality.<sup>55</sup>

Wittgenstein's insight into language provides a suggestive parallel. Just as meaning does not reside in a hidden object but only in use, so the image of God does not reside in a hidden inner essence but only in relation. Both collapse the Cartesian temptation to think of truth as something inwardly beheld. Both push us outward, into public life. Even more strikingly, Luther insists that the image of God is communal. The image cannot be borne in isolation, but is social from the outset. Just as there can be no private language, there can be no private *imago Dei*.

When Jill reflected on all of this, the idea of authenticity began to dissolve. She realized that to speak of an inner essence was to evade her concrete ethical

responsibilities. The image of God is not to be found in the hidden recesses of her subjectivity, but in the public life she shares with her husband and children, in the possibilities set before her in which she can act in faith and love. To pursue authenticity as essence was to flee this vocation. To live the image of God is not to discover herself but to lose herself in responsibility.

In this way Luther provides a theological grammar that complements Wittgenstein's and even answers Sartre's despair. Meaning is use, not essence; the self is vocation, not kernel. Both resist the modern temptation to treat authenticity as an inward discovery. Furthermore, both, in different registers, point toward the same truth: *what our culture prizes as authenticity is too often only bad faith in disguise*. The more authentic way, the one closer to Heidegger's *Eigentlichkeit*, is also the harder way: to acknowledge that the self is not given inwardly but constituted outwardly, in responsibility before God and neighbor.

## 6. Theological Reframing: Freedom, Language, and Responsibility

JILL'S EMBRACE OF AUTHENTICITY HAD SEEMED, at first, to give her life a new solidity. By declaring "I am gay," she believed she had finally uncovered the truth of her being, a kernel of identity that justified her decisions. However, Sartre would have helped her to see that this appeal to essence was a flight from freedom, a refusal of responsibility. Furthermore, Heidegger would have shown her that the cultural idol of authenticity was not what *Eigentlichkeit* meant, for genuine authenticity is not the discovery of a hidden kernel but the owning up to one's finitude and responsibility. And Luther went further still, revealing that freedom and responsibility are not tragic impositions but the very shape of our creaturely existence before God.

With Luther's help, Jill could begin to see that the alternative to authenticity is not despair but vocation. For vocation is the grammar in which freedom and responsibility are enacted. To say "I am free" is not to name a private essence but to confess a gift received from God and a calling to serve the neighbor. Freedom is thus not the opposite of responsibility but its condition.

This reframing turns the question of identity inside out. Jill had thought her deepest task was to ask, *Who am I really, deep inside?* But Luther and Wittgenstein together suggest that this question is already misleading. The self is not hidden within, waiting to be uncovered. The self is constituted in use, in relation, in responsibility. The more faithful question is: *How shall I live responsibly before God and neighbor?*

Here language and theology converge. Wittgenstein insists that meaning is not a hidden object but a use within a grammar. Luther insists that the image of God

is not an essence but a relation of faith and love. Both deconstruct the fantasy of inward essence and redirect us toward public enactment.

This means that Jill's declaration "I am gay" cannot function as an escape hatch from her obligations. For such a claim is not a report of a private fact but a public move that reconfigures her web of responsibilities. She cannot dissolve her marriage and family simply by appealing to a hidden truth about herself, because there is no such hidden truth. There is only the public drama of vocation, in which her freedom and responsibility remain.

And this is precisely where Sartre's dictum that a man is "a being which is what it is not and which is not what it is" finds theological resonance.<sup>56</sup> Jill is her desires, but she is not bound by them. She is her family roles, but she is not reducible to them. She is always more, always responsible, always free to act otherwise. Sartre leaves this freedom suspended in anguish; Luther grounds it in God's promise. For the Christian, to be free is not to be condemned but to be called to live by faith before God and in love toward neighbor.

Jill's turmoil, then, is reframed. She thought she was trapped between repression and authenticity: either she would deny her essence and live inauthentically, or she would embrace it and live honestly. But now she sees that this binary is false. There is no hidden essence to repress or discover. There is only the public life of responsibility, in which she remains bound to God and neighbor. *The question is not whether she will live authentically but whether she will live faithfully.*

This is not to deny the reality of her desires. They are real, and they shape her experience. But they do not dictate her essence, because there is no essence of that kind. Desires are features of her life, not its ground. To treat them as ground is to slip into bad faith. To acknowledge them truthfully is to place them within the larger horizon of vocation.

This horizon changes everything. For Jill, to say "I am gay" is not to absolve herself of responsibility but to deepen it. Her words call forth new expectations from others, reshape her bonds, and press her into decisions. To utter them is to act, to commit, to bind herself. The ethical cannot be escaped; it only intensifies.

The Christian language of the *imago Dei* makes this intensification explicit. The image of God is not a hidden kernel but the very possibility of relation: faith toward God, love toward neighbor. Jill bears this image not by discovering who she is inwardly but by living out her responsibilities publicly. The *imago Dei* is always relational, always communal, always enacted. Just as there can be no private language, there can be no private *imago Dei*.

This reframing disarms the cultural idol of authenticity. Our culture tells us that the bravest act is to peer inward, discover one's true self, and then live outwardly

in light of it. But the Christian vision says otherwise: the self is not hidden within but enacted without. Freedom is not the liberty to express an essence but the gift of being bound to God and neighbor in love.

Thus, Jill's crisis is revealed to be ethical from beginning to end. She is not a victim of hidden truths but a free creature called to responsibility. Her task is not to live authentically but to live faithfully. Not to discover her essence but to enact her vocation.

And in this recognition, she begins to glimpse the paradox Jesus spoke: "Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matt. 16:25). Jill loses the fantasy of an inner authentic self, and in so doing finds her true self, not hidden within, but lived out in responsibility before God and neighbor.

## 7. Conclusion: Losing Ourselves to Find Ourselves

WHEN JILL BEGAN HER JOURNEY, SHE THOUGHT she was undertaking an act of courage. She believed that within her lay the hidden truth of her authentic self, a self that only needed to be uncovered and confessed. To be authentic, she assumed, was to live outwardly in harmony with this inward essence. Her declaration "I am gay" seemed the culmination of months of inner searching, a discovery that justified breaking the fragile bonds of family life in order to be honest.

Yet what she came to see is that this picture was itself an illusion. Wittgenstein showed her that the words she used to describe herself could not name hidden private objects; they acquired their meaning only within the shared grammars of public life. To say "I am gay" was not to report an inner essence but to make a public move with ethical consequences. Moreover, Sartre revealed that appeals to authenticity were, in fact, instances of *mauvaise foi*, or bad faith, ways of fleeing freedom by pretending that orientations exist that dictate paths. Heidegger clarified that the popular idol of authenticity was a distortion of *Eigentlichkeit*, for true authenticity is not the uncovering of an inner kernel but the willingness to face one's finitude and responsibility. And Luther reframed the whole matter by grounding freedom not in despair but in vocation, where the self is constituted not by hidden essence but by relation—faith toward God and love toward neighbor.

Jill had thought that her choice was between repression and authenticity: either deny her true self or embrace it. But the philosophical and theological tradition teaches that this binary is false. There is no hidden essence to repress or to discover. The self is not a treasure chest waiting to be opened but a life lived in responsibility. Authenticity, in the cultural sense, is too often only a mask for evasion. What matters is faithfulness: living as one who is free before God and bound in love to others.

This does not diminish Jill's desires, but places them in their proper frame. They are real, but they are not definitive. They are features of her existence, but they do not constitute her being. To treat them as essence is to fall into bad faith. To acknowledge them honestly is to situate them within the wider horizon of vocation, where freedom is exercised not in solitary authenticity but in communal responsibility.

The paradox is clear. Jill had set out to find herself, but in doing so, she almost lost herself, lost her family, lost her neighbor, lost her very sense of responsibility. It was only in recognizing that her true self is not discovered inwardly but enacted outwardly that she began to find it again. The self is not given as essence but as calling; not hidden within but lived in relation.

Here Luther's language of the *imago Dei* is decisive. The image of God is not some hidden property or inward disposition. It is the possibility of living rightly before God and neighbor, a relational reality enacted in faith and love. Just as Wittgenstein denied the possibility of a private language, Luther denies the possibility of a private image of God. The *imago Dei* is always communal, always public, always enacted.

This means that Jill's most urgent task is not to live authentically in the cultural sense but to live faithfully in the theological sense. *She is called not to discover who she is but to enact who she is called to be.* And this enactment will always bind her to others, for her life is inseparable from her responsibilities as wife, mother, neighbor, creature of God.

The Christian paradox is that in losing ourselves we find ourselves. Jill had thought she must find her essence in order to live truly. But she discovered instead that she must lose the illusion of essence in order to live faithfully. *She lost the idol of authenticity and, in so doing, found the reality of vocation.* She lost the fantasy of a self that is hidden within and, in so doing, found the truth of the self that is constituted in relation.

To live in this way is not easy. It is far harder than the cultural script of authenticity. It demands more courage, not less. For it requires one to accept that there is no escape from responsibility, no essence to dictate the path, no inner truth that absolves us of our freedom. It requires us to face ourselves as we truly are: free, responsible, sinful, and bound to God and neighbor.

And yet this harder way is also the more hopeful way. For in Christ, freedom is not condemnation but gift. Responsibility is not a crushing weight, but the very form of life given to us. To live in vocation is to live in the image of God, and to live in the image of God is to live truly.

Thus, Jill's story ends not with authenticity but with faithfulness, not with the discovery of essence but with the enactment of vocation. She had tried to find her-

self, and she almost lost everything. But in losing the illusion of authenticity, she began to find the reality of the self: a self called into freedom and responsibility before God and neighbor.

The moral of Jill's story is that true human identity is not an inward discovery of hidden faculties or orientations, nor is it secured by the structures of self into which culture bids us peer. Human anthropology is not an intrinsic affair but an extrinsic gift, grounded in the sheer graciousness of God. To be human is not to excavate the self but to be addressed from beyond the self, to stand as an *ecstatic self* whose life and identity are constituted in the divine intentionality that calls, redeems, and sustains. Jill's truth, then, is not what she finds buried within but what she receives from without. For the self becomes itself only in being given away, and life becomes life only as it is lifted into God.

More simply, the self is not a treasure hidden within but a gift bestowed from without. Life is not secured by turning inward but by being turned outward. *For we are ultimately an ecstatic self, alive only in the gracious gaze of God.*

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## Notes

1. See Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Harvard University Press, 1992), for an early and influential philosophical account of authenticity in modern culture.
2. For a sociological analysis of the performative culture of authenticity in modern media, see Eva Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul: Therapy, Emotions, and the Culture of Self-Help* (University of California Press, 2008).
3. On the cultural and moral elevation of authenticity, see Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Harvard University Press, 1972).
4. Compare with Michel Foucault's account of the "confessional" self in *The History of Sexuality*, Volume 1 (Pantheon, 1978), where truth-telling becomes a ritual of identity formation.
5. This conception of the self aligns with the expressive individualism described by Robert Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (University of California Press, 1985).

6. In contemporary philosophy, externalism names a family of positions that locate the grounds of meaning, knowledge, and even mental content outside the private self. In semantics, Hilary Putnam's "semantic externalism" argues that words do not secure their reference merely by what is in the speaker's head, but by causal and social relations to the world and community of speakers (see Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981]). In epistemology, Alvin Goldman's "epistemic externalism" contends that a belief counts as knowledge not because the subject can internally justify it, but because it arises from reliable cognitive processes connected to the world (see Alvin I. Goldman, *Epistemology and Cognition* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986]). This epistemic move has been influential in theology as well, most notably in Alvin Plantinga's "reformed epistemology," which argues that Christian belief can be warranted apart from internal evidential proofs so long as it is produced by properly functioning cognitive faculties aimed at truth (see Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2000]). Taken together, these developments challenge the Cartesian picture of a self-sufficient subject by showing that meaning and knowledge depend on relations external to the mind, and they open the way for the deeper claim advanced later in this article, namely that even the being of the self is externally grounded in God's primal intentionality.
7. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (Washington Square Press, 1956), especially the section on "*mauvaise foi*" (pp. 86–116 in many editions).
8. This claim anticipates Ludwig Wittgenstein's critique of private language *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte, 4th ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), *Philosophical Investigations* (§243–§315).
9. See Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991). In this text, Giddens discusses the "reflexive project of the self" in late modernity, where identity becomes something continuously constructed through introspection and choice.
10. Cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), where Ricoeur critiques the notion of identity as stable essence, emphasizing instead the narrative and ethical construction of selfhood.
11. Judith Butler explores the ethics and implications of self-narration, especially the role of recognition in constituting identity. See her *Giving an Account of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 8–12.
12. Charles Larmore offers a philosophical account of why authenticity holds such normative power in contemporary self-understanding in *The Practices of the Self* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 1–10.
13. See Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), where Rieff critiques the modern turn toward therapeutic self-justification and the psychologization of moral discourse.
14. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 216–225, where MacIntyre critiques emotivism and modern moral fragmentation, and points out that cultural stories often fail to ground coherent ethics of virtue.
15. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §243.
16. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §293.

17. See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §435.
18. Wittgenstein observes, “A rule stands there like a signpost. — Does the signpost leave no doubt about the way I have to go? ... But where does it say which way I am to follow it; whether in the direction of its finger or (for example) the opposite one?” (*Philosophical Investigations*, §85). Commentators often summarize the point with the aphorism: “A signpost is of no use if it can be interpreted in any way.” Saul Kripke famously developed this into the “rule-following paradox,” arguing that no fact about an individual could determine what counts as following a rule, but only the communal practices of application (see Saul A. Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982]).
19. *Ibid.*, §507.
20. Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 343–376.
21. See James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009). Smith argues that human beings are “liturgical animals” whose loves and desires are shaped by cultural and religious practices more deeply than by intellectual beliefs.
22. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §293.
23. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §580.
24. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §435. Paul paraphrased what Wittgenstein was saying about language: “If it is asked, ‘how do sentences manage to represent?’—the answer might be: ‘Don’t you know? Surely you see it, when you use one.’ After all, nothing is concealed. How does a sentence do it?—Don’t you know? After all, nothing is hidden.”
25. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §272: “The essential thing about private experience is really not that each person possesses his own specimen, but that nobody knows whether other people also have *this* or something else. The assumption would thus be possible—though unverifiable—that one section of mankind had one visible impression of red, and another section another.” He continues in §273: “What about the word ‘red’?—am I to say that it signifies something ‘confronting us all,’ and that everyone should really have another word, besides this one, to signify his *own* impression of red? Or is it like this: the word ‘red’ signifies something known to us all; and in addition, for each person, it signifies something known only to him? (Or perhaps, rather: it *refers* to something known only to him.)” Wittgenstein argues that “criteria” are public; they are bound to shared forms of life and practices of verification. A purely private object or sensation could not serve as a criterion, since criteria are what *others* can check or recognize.
26. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §§243–244.
27. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §§198–201.
28. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §§202.
29. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §§258–260.
30. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §§270–271.
31. See Alain Badiou, *Wittgenstein’s Antiphilosophy*, trans. Bruno Bosteels (London: Verso, 2019), 54–56.
32. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §§293.
33. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §§265.

34. For more, see A. Crary and R. Read, eds., *The New Wittgenstein* (London: Routledge, 2002).
35. See L. van Dijk and R. Withagen, “The Horizontal Worldview: A Wittgensteinian Attitude towards Scientific Psychology,” *Theory & Psychology* 24, no. 1 (2014): 3–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959354313517415>. Accessed September 22, 2025.
36. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay in Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956), 86–116.
37. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 102.
38. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, trans. Carol Macomber (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 22.
39. See Robert C. Solomon, *Not Passion's Slave: Emotions and Choice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
40. See Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego: An Existentialist Theory of Consciousness*, trans., annot., & intro., Forrest Williams and Robert Kirkpatrick (New York: Hill and Wang, A Division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1960), 31.
41. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh, rev. Dennis J. Schmidt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010), §§9–44.
42. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §27.
43. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §53–54.
44. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, §65. “Only because Dasein is determined as temporality does it make possible for itself the authentic potentiality-of-being-a-whole of anticipatory resoluteness which we characterized.” *Ibid.*, §65, p. 311.
45. Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 13–41.
46. Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1-5*, vol. 1, p. 60, in *Luther's Works, American Edition*, vols. 1-30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955-76); vols. 31-55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957-86); vols. 56-82, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia, 2009), hereafter, LW. For the original, see Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe [Schriften]*, 73 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–2009), 42:45.3-7, hereafter, WA: “Doctores autem reliqui fere Augustium sequuntur, qui Aristotelis divisionem retinet, quod imago Dei sint potentiae animae, memoria, mens vel intellectus, et voluntas; in his tribus dieunt consistere imaginem Dei, quae in omnibus hominibus est.”
47. LW 1:61; WA 42:46.4-10: “Vereor autem, ne, postquam haec imago per peccatum amissa est, non satis eam possimus intelligere. Memoriam, voluntatem et mentem habemus, quidem, sed corruptissima et gravissime debilitata, imo, ut clarius dicam, prorsus leprosa et immunda. Si enim istae potentiae sunt imago Dei, sequetur etiam Satanam ad imaginem Dei conditum esse, qui profecto illa naturalia longe habet validiora, quam nos habemus, sicut est memoria et intellectus summus et voluntas obstinatissima.”
48. LW 1:62; WA 42:46.11-15: “Ergo est imago Dei longe aliud, nempe opus Dei singulare. Si qui tamen contendunt has potentias esse imaginem istam, fateantur eas quasi leprosas et immundas esse. Sicut leprosum hominem tamen hominem appellamus, quanquam in carne leprosi omnia paene mortua sunt et stupent, nisi quod ad libidinem commoventur vehementius.”

49. My translation. WA 42:46, (Rörer addition): “Similitudo et imago dei est vera et perfecta dei noticia, summa dei dilectio, aeterna vita, aeterna leticia, eterna securitas. Ut enim in deum non potest cadere timor mortis aut tristitia, Sic nec in hominem, si non lapsus fuisset, ullus timor mortis aut tristitia cadere potuisset. Sed si timor in eo [non] fuisset, vitae securitas, summa laetitia, summa dilectio, praeterea nec peccatum nec morbum nec bestiarum saeviciam timuisset, omnibus etiam immanissimis bestiis ut mansuetissimis. In summa: sicut ipse regeretur a deo, ita caetera animalia omnia regere potuisset, Sicque haec est vera similitudo et imago dei: aeterna vita, aeterna securitate et voluptate perfrui atque in omnes creaturas imperium exercere.”
50. LW 31:297; WA 2:145.9: “Haec est qua Christus iustus est et iustificans per fidem.”
51. LW 31:298; WA 2:146.8-19: “Igitur per fidem in Christum fit iusticia Christi nostra iusticia et omnia quae sunt ipsius, immo ipsemet noster fit. Ideo appellat eam Apostolus iusticiam dei ad Ro: i. Iusticia dei revelatur in Euangelio, sicut scriptum est: Iustus ex fide vivit. Denique et fides talis vocatur iusticia dei, ut eiusdem iij. arbitramur hominem iustificari per fidem. Haec est iusticia infinita et omnia peccata in momento absorbens, quia impossibile est, quod peccatum in Christo haereat: at qui credit in Christo, haeret in Christo, estque unum cum Christo, habens eandem iusticiam cum ipso. Ideo impossibile est, quod in eo maneat peccatum. Et haec iusticia est prima, fundamentum, causa, origo omnis iusticiae propriae seu actualis, quia vere ipsa datur pro originali iusticia in Adam perdita et operatur id, immo maius quam illa iusticia originalis fuisset operata.”
52. LW 31:344; WA 7:49.22-25: “Christianus homo omnium dominus est liberrimus, nulli subiectus. Christianus homo omnium servus est officiosissimus, omnibus subiectus.”
53. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 43.
54. LW 1, 68; WA 42:51.20-24: “Coetera animalia dicuntur vestigia Dei, solus autem homo est imago Dei, sicut est in sentiis. Nam in coeteris creaturis cognoscitur Deus ceu in vestigio, in homine autem, praesertim in Adamo, vere cognoscitur, quia in eo est sapientia illa, iusticia et omnium rerum cognitio, ut recte dicatur μικρόκοσμος. Intelligit enim coelum, terram et totam creaturam.”
55. See WA 39, I, 109, 1-3: “Extra nos esse est ex nostris viribus non esse. Est quidem iustitia possessio nostra, quia nobis donata est ex misericordia, tamen aliena a nobis, quia non. meruimus eam” (See LW 34:178); WA 39.I:83.24-27: “Tam certum est, Christum seu iustitiam Christi, cum sit extra nos et aliena nobis, non posse nostris operibus comprehendendi.” (See LW 34:152); WA 56:268-9: “Reputatio enim eius non in nobis nec in potestate nostra est. Ergo nec iustitia nostra in nobis est nec in potestate nostra. Sed ex sola Dei reputatione Iusti sumus.” (See LW 25:257).
56. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 100.

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