

Good Faith and Sincerity: Sartrean Virtues of Self-Becoming in David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest*¹

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Introduction

Sincerity is widely regarded as an important theme in the work of David Foster Wallace. However, most publications that discuss the importance of sincerity in Wallace's writing, take up this theme—perhaps precisely because it has become such a commonplace characterization—without defining exactly what that notion of sincerity means, and without adequately mapping out where in Wallace's work it can be found.² In this article, I hope to contribute to furthering our understanding of this theme in Wallace's work by offering a philosophical analysis of *Infinite Jest*'s portrayal of the characters Mario Incandenza, Don Gately and Hal Incandenza, as individuals who

¹ This chapter offers a condensed version of the chapter on sincerity from *Existentialist Engagement in Wallace, Eggers and Foer: A Philosophical Analysis of Contemporary American Literature* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015).

² E.g. Adam Kirsch, 'The Importance of Being Earnest', *The New Republic*, 18 August 2011; A.O. Scott, 'The Panic of Influence – Review of *Brief Interviews with Hideous Men*', *The New York Review of Books* 47/2 (2000), pp. 39-43. An exception is, for example: Adam Kelly, 'David Foster Wallace and the New Sincerity in American Fiction', in David Hering (ed.), *Consider David Foster Wallace. Critical Essays* (Los Angeles/Austin: SSMG Press, 2010), pp. 131-146. However, Kelly's broad approach is different from the more specific one employed in this article, which offers a philosophical analysis of the portrayal of sincerity in *Infinite Jest*. For my own, more general exploration, see: Allard den Dulk, 'American Literature: A New Aesthetic of Sincerity, Reality and Community', in Thomas Vaessens and Yra van Dijk (eds), *Reconsidering the Postmodern. European Literature Beyond Relativism* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), pp. 225-241.

embody what can be regarded as a contemporary version of the ‘virtue’ of sincerity.³

To this end, I will employ relevant aspects of Jean-Paul Sartre’s early, phenomenological-existentialist philosophy as a heuristic perspective. Although Wallace does not make explicit reference to Sartre in either his fiction or in interviews and essays, Zadie Smith describes Sartre as a ‘great favourite’ of Wallace, and Smith also suggests that Sartre’s dicta of being ‘condemned to be free’ and ‘responsible for that freedom’ characterize the predicament of Wallace’s characters. The connection between Sartre and Wallace follows from the way each describes consciousness in his various works: namely that consciousness should always be directed outward. To formulate this in Sartrean terms, consciousness should ‘transcend’ itself toward the world. As Smith writes: ‘If Wallace insists on awareness, his particular creed is—to use a Wallacerian word—*extrorse*’, which means ‘facing outward’, ‘awareness must move always in an outward direction’.⁴ Let me explore this idea a bit more below.

Existentialist philosophy in general offers one of the most illuminating perspectives on Wallace’s fiction.⁵ The view of consciousness outlined above ties in with the general existentialist conception of the self, which can be recognized throughout Wallace’s work. According to this conception, an individual is not automatically a self, but has to *become* one. In the existentialist view, there is no true core that an individual always already is or has, and which underlies selfhood.⁶ Becoming a self is the task of

³ Throughout this article, the term ‘virtue’ refers to what is needed to ‘be’ human, a self; cf. ‘In the general sense, virtue is capacity; in the particular sense, it is human capacity, the power to be human’ (André Comte-Sponville, *A Short Treatise on the Great Virtues. The Uses of Philosophy in Everyday Life*, trans. Catherine Temerson [London: Vintage, 2003], p. 3). Cf. Wallace’s remark about the task of fiction: ‘Fiction’s about what it is to be a fucking *human being*’ (Larry McCaffery, ‘An Interview with David Foster Wallace’, *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 13/2 [1993], p. 131).

⁴ Zadie Smith, ‘Brief Interviews with Hideous Men: The Difficult Gifts of David Foster Wallace’, in *Changing My Mind: Occasional Essays* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2009), pp. 264, 268.

⁵ Cf. Allard den Dulk, ‘Beyond Endless “Aesthetic” Irony’: A Comparison of the Irony Critique of Søren Kierkegaard and David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*’, *Studies in the Novel* 44/3 (2012), pp. 325-345. With the term ‘existentialism’ I am referring mainly to the philosophical and/or literary work of Kierkegaard, Sartre and Camus, but also Dostoevsky and Kafka.

⁶ Cf. Wallace’s remark, in a talk on Kafka, that it is a common mistake to think ‘that a self is something you just *have*’. According to Wallace, we should acknowledge ‘that the horrific struggle to establish a human self results in a self whose humanity is inseparable from that horrific struggle. That our endless and impossible journey toward home is in fact our home’ (David Foster Wallace, ‘Some Remarks on Kafka’s Funniness from Which Probably Not Enough Has Been Removed’, *Consider the Lobster, and Other Essays* [New York: Little, Brown & Company, 2005], pp. 64-65).

human life: a human being has to integrate his individual limitations and possibilities into a unified existence that he regards as his responsibility—this is the process of developing a self. We can recognize this view of the self underlying *Infinite Jest's* portrayal of its characters; for example, in a negative way (that is, through what happens when the self is not so developed), when the characters suffering from addiction are described as having no self, as being ‘empty’ inside; conversely, Don Gately is described as ‘returned to himself’ after his life has become informed by values and principles through his participation in Alcoholics Anonymous (AA).⁷ Throughout this article, I will argue that sincerity is the ‘self-ideal’ or virtue that follows from this view of the self and that is portrayed in *Infinite Jest*.

What might seem problematic about such an assertion is that several influential theorists have argued that sincerity is an outdated (pre-Enlightenment) ideal and that, in fact, authenticity represents the self-ideal appropriate to contemporary Western life.⁸ One objection raised against sincerity is that it seems to be an ideal pursued not for oneself but for the sake of others; that sincerity is actually a social obligation, namely not to deceive others.⁹ A second objection is that sincerity, as a supposed ‘congruence between avowal and actual feeling’, seems to imply a fixed, static self with certain essential qualities that can be sincerely communicated through an utterance or action.¹⁰

It remains to be seen, however, whether these objections against sincerity are necessarily justified. It is true that sincerity, as a striving for a connection between the self and its actions in the world, has an undeniably public character. But the fact that sincerity reveals itself through action, and, consequently, is always public and (partly) aimed at the other, does not mean that it amounts to merely fulfilling a public role and therefore cannot be undertaken for the self.¹¹ Also, this connection between self and action

⁷ David Foster Wallace, *Infinite Jest: A Novel* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1996), pp. 694–695, 204, 860.

⁸ E.g. Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 6; Charles Guignon, *On Being Authentic* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 26–27; Jacob Golomb, *In Search of Authenticity. From Kierkegaard to Camus* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 9.

⁹ Cf. Guignon, *On Being Authentic*, p. 27; Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, p. 9.

¹⁰ Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity*, p. 2; Golomb speaks of an individual ‘whose inner convictions and commitments are congruent with that individual’s behaviour’, and ‘[such] correspondence presumes a static subject’ (Golomb, *In Search of Authenticity*, p. 9).

¹¹ I agree with Mariëtte Willemsen’s observation that it is, by definition, impossible to be sincere toward others and at the same time insincere, untruthful to oneself; and that sincerity, truthfulness toward oneself seems to be a condition of sincerity toward others (Mariëtte Willemsen, ‘Friedrich Nietzsches getuigenis: de waarachtigheid van een immoralist’, in Atie Th. Brüggemann-Kruijff, Henk G. Geertsema and Mariëtte F. Willemsen (eds), *Levensrecht en bescheiden: essays over authenticiteit* [Kampen: Kok Agora, 1998], p. 148).

does not necessarily imply a static, essential self: it means, above all, that the self *is* its actions (that the self comes into being in the world). This does not equal a naïve theory of the correspondence of inner and outer. When we speak of a sincere promise, the sincerity of that promise is judged by what I undertake to fulfill that promise, not by some internal state of being.¹² I will argue that this—the opening-up of the self, the connection of the self and its actions—is portrayed in *Infinite Jest* as what the contemporary individual stands in need of.

Conversely, the ideal of authenticity *does* seem to imply a fixed self-essence, and also a constant self-reflection that isolates the individual from the world (and its actions in that world)—which, in turn, is what is criticized in *Infinite Jest*.¹³ The authentic individual lives purely according to his own self-acquired laws and insights, free from corrupting outside constraints. Firstly, this ideal (over against the outer-directed ideal of sincerity) seems to depend on the implicit assumption of a profound, internal purity of the self that differs fundamentally from the impurity that lies outside it. Although most theorists speak of authenticity as the supposed product of continuous self-creation and development, if there is nothing inherent about the authentic self, the question arises as to whether we can even speak meaningfully about something—a self—that is at risk of being corrupted from the outside, in the first place. If authenticity requires the self to be autonomous—that is, not subject to any external influences, being completely self-defining—then that self-definition (if it is even possible) has to consist, by definition, of influences that are inherently present in that self. Secondly, this ideal requires constant self-reflection from the individual, analyzing and securing his own autonomy, and distancing himself from the outside world, which is after all the source of inauthentic, corrupting influences.¹⁴

So, both authenticity and sincerity *can* be seen to imply the erroneous conception of the self as something essential and fixed. But only the notion of sincerity, with its emphasis on the importance of the other and on the connection between the self and its actions, can also be regarded as expressive of a concept of the self as *external*, as shaped through choice and action, and through community and dialogue with others. And this, as I will argue, is the virtue that arises from Wallace's *Infinite Jest*.

¹² Choosing, taking responsibility for my actions, is also what existentialist thinkers like Sartre desire from the individual who has to become a self.

¹³ This ties in with, among other things, the problem of irony, and the critique of that formulated in *Infinite Jest*; cf. Den Dulk, 'Beyond Endless "Aesthetic" Irony', pp. 325-345.

¹⁴ Cf. Guignon, *On Being Authentic*, p. 92.

What might seem to be a problematic aspect of my existentialist analysis of the virtue of sincerity, is that Sartre speaks of *authenticity* when labelling the self-ideal of his existentialist philosophy, and he explicitly *criticizes* what he calls sincerity.¹⁵ However, I will show that Sartre's use of the term authenticity and his critique of sincerity are in fact inconsistent with his own descriptions of consciousness.

A bigger problem than terminology, is the fact that existentialism is often seen as emphasizing the importance of the autonomy of the individual. This aspect of existentialism accounts for its alleged social pessimism: that the individual, in his attempts to be a self, is in constant struggle with the outside world and with other people. Another important aspect of existentialism, however, casts a completely different light on its call to become a self; namely, existentialism emphasizes the importance of choice and action as well as the importance of others in self-becoming, expressed by the notion of sincerity. Furthermore, as we have already noted, existentialism is opposed to the notion of an inner self, implied in the ideal of authenticity.

Through its contemporary portrayal of existentialist self-becoming, *Infinite Jest* involves itself in the discussion about the virtue that the existentialist tradition can be seen to pursue, and, in my opinion, contributes a much-needed corrective to the tradition. *Infinite Jest* corrects the above-described, recurring fascination with autonomy that represents the major inconsistency of existentialism. My analysis of *Infinite Jest* will rehabilitate a redefined notion of sincerity as the basic existentialist virtue of the contemporary individual.

Here is how I will proceed in what follows. First, I will outline a corrected and reconstructed version of Sartre's view of self-becoming, one consistent with his general view of consciousness and that can serve as a framework for understanding *Infinite Jest*. It is important to note that the conceptual demarcations of this reconstruction of the Sartrean concept of sincerity is partly prompted by what I have found in Wallace's work. Second, I will analyze the characters Mario, Gately and Hal in order to show how we can recognize the redefined concept of sincerity in *Infinite Jest*.

¹⁵ Authenticity is often used as the term for the self-ideal that existentialist philosophy *in general* can be seen to promote, but, in fact, only Sartre explicitly employs the term. Kierkegaard does not use it, although he is sometimes translated as doing so—rather he speaks of 'passion', 'purity of will', et cetera. Camus uses the term sporadically, but in a general sense, not as embodying a clear notion of the self (e.g. Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, trans. Anthony Bower [New York: Vintage Books, 1991], p. 285). For the rest, Camus can actually be seen as championing the importance of other-directedness for the meaningful existence of the self (especially in *The Rebel*).

Sincerity: A Sartrean, existentialist ideal

One of the most famous notions of Sartre's early philosophy is the notion of bad faith, a form of self-deceit in which the individual tries to escape the tension that characterizes self-becoming. Sartre's writings contain multiple notions that might appear to be an alternative to bad faith, for example: good faith, sincerity and authenticity. However, he employs these terms inconsistently; as a result, it is unclear what the alternative to bad faith looks like, and what it is called. Therefore, with the portrayals offered by Wallace's work in mind, and with the help of critical reconstructions of Sartre's philosophy (most importantly, those of Ronald Santoni and Joseph Catalano), I will try to sketch out a consistent terminology, one that is in line with Sartre's general view of consciousness but, above all, serves as a fruitful heuristic perspective for the analysis of *Infinite Jest* further on in this chapter.¹⁶

Good faith and bad faith

Sartre formulates the distinction between good and bad faith as follows: 'Bad faith does not hold the norms and criteria of truth as they are accepted by the critical thought of good faith. What it decides first, in fact, is the nature of truth.'¹⁷ Bad faith is a form of self-deceit.¹⁸ According to Sartre, 'the double property of the human being' is that he 'is at once a *facticity* and a *transcendence*': a human being always finds himself in a certain factual situation, but at the same time is always already beyond that situation, in the sense that he is always free to relate to it in a new way. The individual in bad faith tries to mask for himself this tension that characterizes his existence. To that end, he formulates 'two-faced concepts' and decides to be convinced by these concepts, while '[i]n truth, [he has] not persuaded [him]self.'¹⁹ This is what Sartre means by bad faith not holding the norms and criteria of critical thought.

¹⁶ Seeing that this interpretation is my final goal, and not a reading of Sartre per se, I am not concerned with taking into consideration all of Sartre's work and adhering to his contrasting, inconsistent use of the terms good faith, sincerity and authenticity therein. As stated above, the goal of this section is a critical reconstruction of Sartre's terminology that offers a consistent perspective for the analysis of *Infinite Jest*.

¹⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness. An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 91.

¹⁸ Cf. 'in bad faith it is from myself that I am hiding the truth' (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 72); cf. the addicted characters in *Infinite Jest*, who offer countless textbook examples of bad faith behavior (see the next section).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 79, 91.

Sartre's description implies that, conversely, good faith *does* hold the norms and criteria of critical thought. It demands persuasive evidence, while with bad faith 'a peculiar type of evidence appears; non-persuasive evidence,' says Sartre.²⁰ Santoni writes: '[whereas bad faith] is a closed, uncritical attitude toward available evidence, the fundamental attitude or original determination of being in good faith is an open, critical attitude toward evidence.'²¹

Unfortunately, Sartre elaborates very little on the spontaneous-critical character of good faith. Further on in *Being and Nothingness*, it even seems as if Sartre qualifies good faith as a form of bad faith. However, we have to distinguish between normal good faith, and good faith that turns itself into an ideal, that is, that wants to coincide with its own belief. That there is nothing wrong with the former is shown by Sartre's own example: 'I believe [*in good faith*] that my friend Pierre feels friendship for me.' I believe it, even though 'I do not have for it any self-evident intuition, for the nature of the object does not lend itself to intuition.'²² Friendship is not something that can be known with complete certainty, as for example a mathematical sum can: 'past and present actions seem to indicate this friendship, but this evidence can never present itself to me as apodictic, as proving his friendship in the sense that two and two is four,' writes Catalano.²³ The friendship is something that I have to 'trust', says Sartre, 'I decide to believe in it, and to maintain myself in this decision,' in good faith.²⁴ There is nothing wrong with believing in good faith that someone is your friend based on certain signals and indicators, because, according to Sartre, friendship is something than can *never* be known to be there with complete certainty. You can only believe that someone is your friend.

Good faith becomes problematic for Sartre *only* when it turns its own belief into an ideal; that is, when faith in one's friendship with Pierre is not prompted by signs of that friendship, but by the wish to 'believe what one believes', the wish to fully '*coincide*' with one's belief.²⁵ According to Sartre, the characteristic of believing is that 'every belief involves not quite believing'. 'Is Pierre my friend? I do not know; I believe so.' Believing is

²⁰ Ibid., p. 91.

²¹ Ronald E. Santoni, *Bad Faith, Good Faith, and Authenticity in Sartre's Early Philosophy* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), p. 71; cf. Joseph S. Catalano, *A Commentary on Jean-Paul Sartre's Being and Nothingness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 87.

²² Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 92.

²³ Catalano, *A Commentary on Jean-Paul Sartre's Being and Nothingness*, p. 87.

²⁴ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 92.

²⁵ cf. Joseph S. Catalano, *Good Faith and Other Essays. Perspectives on a Sartrean Ethics* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1996), pp. 80-81; Santoni, *Bad Faith, Good Faith, and Authenticity in Sartre's Early Philosophy*, pp. 73-74.

not knowing something for sure; when you would know for sure, it would cease to be belief, writes Sartre. Therefore, the desire ‘to believe what one believes’²⁶—that is, striving to coincide with one’s belief—implies an attempt to disguise and deny the uncertainty of belief, the norms and criteria of critical thought, and is thus a form of bad faith.

But this does not apply to normal good faith. Catalano explains: ‘good faith would seem to be a project of being spontaneously willing to be critical and open.’²⁷ That is, as an immediate attitude, good faith implies a pre-reflective acceptance of the tension in human existence. Contrary to bad faith, good faith implies a truthful recognition of freedom, of our constant not-coinciding with ourselves: ‘Sartre repeatedly states that bad faith is an attempt to flee from our freedom, whereas good faith is an attempt to face our freedom,’ writes Catalano.²⁸

So, bad faith is not the one ‘fundamental ontological condition of freedom’, not man’s original relation to his freedom, even though this is—partly due to Sartre’s own inconsistencies and obscurities—quite a common reading of *Being and Nothingness*.²⁹ Human being is characterized by a ‘lack of being’ (it always transcends what it is at any moment), and, as a result of that lack, is driven by an unfulfillable ‘*desire to be*’³⁰ (consciousness casting itself toward the world, but never being able to coincide with it, to ‘be’ as the world ‘is’). That desire cannot be suppressed, because it is what consciousness is—‘there would be nothing else,’ writes Sartre.³¹ But at the same time, this lack of being and desire to be, constitutes a consciousness of not being able to ‘be’, of not being able to fully coincide with anything; in other words, it is consciousness of the freedom of consciousness and, thus, of the unfulfillability of its desire to be. Bad faith consciousness would imply trying to hide this impossibility for itself. Good faith, even though it shares the ‘desire to be’ that characterizes all consciousness, is an open, critical attitude that does not try to conceal the truth, but recognizes its own freedom, including its ‘unhappy’ character (being driven by a desire that never lets itself be fulfilled).³²

Are good and bad faith then two equally fundamental, spontaneous options that man has in relation to his freedom? In spite of his concise and

²⁶ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 93, 92.

²⁷ Catalano, *A Commentary on Jean-Paul Sartre’s Being and Nothingness*, p. 81.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

²⁹ Catalano, *Good Faith and Other Essays*, p. 77.

³⁰ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 586.

³¹ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 37; cf. Santoni, *Bad Faith, Good Faith, and Authenticity in Sartre’s Early Philosophy*, pp. 83-84.

³² Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 114; cf. Catalano, *A Commentary on Jean-Paul Sartre’s Being and Nothingness*, p. 90.

sometimes inconsistent treatment of good faith, this seems to be Sartre's conclusion. He speaks of 'the two immediate attitudes which we can take in the face of our being'. However, Sartre's own view of consciousness and of the realization of bad faith makes it impossible for bad faith to be a fully spontaneous and pre-reflective attitude. For Sartre claims that: 'Since the unreflective consciousness is a spontaneous self-projection toward its possibilities, it can never be deceived about itself.'³³ Pre-reflective consciousness is sheer intentionality: it does not reflect on itself, so it cannot decide anything about itself, and thus cannot deceive itself about itself. Santoni concludes: 'if, in fact bad faith is a pre-reflective consciousness, then it would appear to follow that, insofar as bad faith is self-deception, bad faith is not possible.'³⁴

Moreover, looking at the descriptions of bad faith itself, it seems impossible to maintain that it is a phenomenon of spontaneous, pre-reflective consciousness. Bad faith is based on a 'firm resolution', forcing itself to believe things that, intuitively, it does not believe. Bad faith does so by means of 'two-faced concepts' which, according to Sartre, 'we forge expressly to persuade ourselves', when we are not really persuaded.³⁵ These steps that consciousness undertakes to put itself in bad faith, require a reflective operation: consciousness has to turn its attention toward itself, at least in part, if it is to resolve anything about itself and 'forge expressly' the concepts for its own deception.³⁶ Within Sartre's view of consciousness, bad faith as a form of self-deceit simply cannot be characterized as a pre-reflective, basic attitude of being (even though Sartre—erroneously—describes it as such).

Sartre repeatedly emphasizes that consciousness pre-reflectively knows that it is freedom.³⁷ Although Sartre is not consistent in some of his descriptions of this aspect of consciousness, bad faith is undeniably to be regarded as the flight of consciousness from its own freedom. In that case, 'there remains the question of how consciousness is aware that it is totally free, which is the necessary condition for flight behavior. One possible explanation is to push the issue on to the pre-reflective consciousness,' suggests Thomas Busch. 'Against all attempts to reduce consciousness to

³³ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 93, 493.

³⁴ Santoni, *Bad Faith, Good Faith, and Authenticity*, p. 125.

³⁵ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 91.

³⁶ Cf. Santoni, *Bad Faith, Good Faith, and Authenticity*, pp. 125-126.

³⁷ E.g. 'And this impossibility is not hidden from consciousness; on the contrary, it is the very stuff of consciousness'; 'at the very moment when I struggle to attain it, I have a vague prejudicative comprehension that I shall not attain it' (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 85-86, 89). These passages are related to the 'desire to be' in what Sartre calls 'sincerity'; further on in this article I will show that Sartre, erroneously, describes sincerity as wanting to be what one is and therefore as a form of bad faith.

a thing there persists “the contestation of non-thetic self-consciousness.” In these cases pre-reflective self-consciousness is treated as an inescapable lucidity of freedom to itself.³⁸

This pre-reflective consciousness, which embodies a truthful awareness and acceptance of ‘human-reality’,³⁹ clearly matches the heart of the attitude of good faith. Indeed, I contend that good faith *is* this pre-reflective awareness that cannot be deceived about itself. In other words, good faith is the imperative, pre-reflective (immediate) basic attitude of man, and bad faith the non-imperative but widespread reflective attitude of flight from, and thus ensuing, the pre-reflective insights of good faith.

Pure reflection and sincerity

As mentioned above, consciousness is driven by a ‘desire to be’, which it, at the same time, pre-reflectively knows is unfulfillable. According to Sartre, reflection initially appears in service of, as accessory to, this ‘desire to be’, to found itself.⁴⁰ In reflection, consciousness is made into an object: the individual tries to determine itself as an object, which is in bad faith. Sartre calls this ‘impure reflection’.⁴¹

The emergence of impure reflection, however, also carries with it the possibility of a conversion, of the emergence of a pure (or: purifying) reflection that realizes the deceit of bad faith and impure reflection.⁴² Sartre writes: ‘What is given first in daily life is impure or constituent reflection.’ As such, it can form the occasion for ‘a modification which it effects on itself and which is in the form of a katharsis’.⁴³ That katharsis is pure reflection: it represents a reflective resumption of the pre-reflective awareness and acceptance of human-reality in good faith.⁴⁴

³⁸ Thomas W. Busch, *The Power of Consciousness and the Force of Circumstances in Sartre’s Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 37-38.

³⁹ This is Sartre’s term for human existence as characterized by consciousness of being facticity and transcendence.

⁴⁰ Cf. Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics*, p. 11; ‘By reflection the for-itself, which has lost itself outside itself, attempts to put itself inside its own being’, and ‘This effort to be to itself its own foundation, [...] inevitably results in failure; and it is precisely this failure which is reflection’ (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 176-177).

⁴¹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 184.

⁴² Cf. ‘Impure reflection is motivation for pure reflection’ (Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics*, p. 12).

⁴³ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 182.

⁴⁴ Cf. ‘Pure reflection can effect upon itself a “catharsis” and as a result, in its thematization of the pre-reflective, take cognizance of the “break in being,” of the non-positional presence to self. [...] in pure reflection the self is grasped as “break in being” [...] and as “having to be”’ (Busch, *The Power of Consciousness*, p. 32).

Therefore, Sartre concludes: 'Pure reflection is good faith.'⁴⁵ Pure reflection does not involve a new awareness—because it was there all along, masked by bad faith—but an internal modification that again reveals the pre-reflective insight of good faith. The realization that one has lived in bad faith 'implies a kind of ontological precomprehension of good faith', writes Santoni, who adds: '[the reflective conversion] adopts, or perhaps returns to, good faith's non-thetic, "joyful" affirmation of freedom.'⁴⁶ Pure reflection means that we are 'both inside and outside at the same time', and 'place spontaneity between parentheses', 'without depriving it of its affirmative force', Sartre writes.⁴⁷ Catalano describes pure reflection as 'a momentary grasp of ourselves while not ceasing in the activity and not turning the activity into an object of study.'⁴⁸

Still, even though pure reflection and good faith entail the same awareness, they are not identical, because the relation of both attitudes to that awareness differs. Good faith is pre-reflective, immediate, not effected by volition; for, as Sartre writes, '[the voluntary act] requires the appearance of a reflective consciousness.'⁴⁹ Good faith is like an intuition, an immediate belief in what is important and what is not, occurring without what could be properly called a *choice*. One can only speak of choice when there is the possibility of conscious consideration of doing something different. That possibility arises with reflection, which emerges as the bad faith attempt to mask the insight of good faith, and subsequently with the possibility of reflectively acknowledging that self-deceit and (again: reflectively) *choosing* the insights of good faith. This reflective resumption of good faith is an act of volition, a choice to live in the awareness and acceptance of that insight, and give shape to the self.

It is this reflective attitude, resuming the awareness of good faith, that I would like to call sincerity, even though Sartre himself calls this attitude authenticity⁵⁰ and describes sincerity as a form of bad faith. However: first of all, with authenticity Sartre chooses a misleading term that implies the opposite of what he wants to recommend. As Catalano explains:

It is clear that Sartre would be opposed to a use of the term 'authenticity' that referred either to being true to oneself or to a privileged reflection [...].

⁴⁵ Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics*, p. 12.

⁴⁶ Santoni, *Bad Faith, Good Faith, and Authenticity in Sartre's Early Philosophy*, p. 124; cf. Hazel E. Barnes, 'Sartre's Concept of the Self', in Harold Bloom (ed.), *Jean-Paul Sartre* (New York: Chelsea House, 2001), p. 75.

⁴⁷ Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics*, pp. 4, 5; cf. Busch, *The Power of Consciousness*, p. 34.

⁴⁸ Catalano, *Good Faith and Other Essays*, p. 156.

⁴⁹ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, p. 473.

⁵⁰ In a famous, concise footnote, Sartre writes: 'this supposes a self-recovery of being which was previously corrupted. This self-recovery we shall call authenticity, the description of which has no place here' (Ibid., p. 94).

In all these senses, the term ‘authenticity’ implies that we have had an original bond either with our own true self or with Nature or Being, and that we have been led astray by the demands of the world.⁵¹

Most Sartre scholars choose to maintain the term authenticity nonetheless, and construe the concept in an idiosyncratic, Sartrean way. I will, however, replace Sartre’s term of authenticity with sincerity.

Secondly, Sartre’s own conception of sincerity is very limited (almost caricatural), and therefore does not do justice to the possibilities of that attitude.⁵² Sartre describes sincerity as a ‘confession’ that we employ so as to no longer be responsible for what we have confessed to.⁵³ Of course, Sartre, as the acute psychologist of bad faith, is right in holding that the individual could use expressions of seeming sincerity in such a way.⁵⁴ However, this description does not do justice to what we generally take sincerity to mean. Generally, we regard someone as sincere when he is honest about himself, toward himself and toward the world; by that we mean exactly the acknowledgment of the multiplicities, the inconsistencies, and the possibilities that every individual consists of at any moment. He is (in a more Sartrean formulation) someone who acknowledges and accepts that he is freedom, who ‘exists’ (in the literal sense of ‘standing out’, actively maintaining, abiding⁵⁵) the tension between transcendence and facticity. Such a conception of sincerity fits smoothly into Sartre’s general philosophy and terminology.⁵⁶

Therefore, and considering the objections to the term authenticity discussed earlier, it seems to me that sincerity, as it was defined above, embodies the existential attitude of the individual who is conscious of his free being, and who, in the reflective resumption of good faith, realizes that he is responsible for the shaping and meaning of his own existence.

⁵¹ Catalano, *Good Faith and Other Essays*, pp. 153-154.

⁵² Cf. Santoni, *Bad Faith, Good Faith, and Authenticity in Sartre’s Early Philosophy*, pp. 10-11.

⁵³ Cf. ‘the sincere man constitutes himself as what he is *in order not to be it*. [...] Total, constant sincerity as a constant effort to adhere to oneself is by nature a constant effort to dissociate oneself from oneself. A person frees himself from himself by the very act by which he makes himself an object for himself. To draw up a perpetual inventory of what one is means constantly to deny oneself and to take refuge in a sphere where one is no longer anything but a pure, free regard’ (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, pp. 88-89).

⁵⁴ Although, a confession for which an individual does not feel accountable to others, would rather seem to be an expression of the ‘self-ideal’ of authenticity.

⁵⁵ There is a clear connection between this conception of existence and the central role of ‘abiding’ in Don Gately’s AA recovery in *Infinite Jest* (e.g. Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 860-861). Cf. Allard den Dulk, ‘The Transcendence of a Meaningful Life: The Portrayal of the Contemporary Self in David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*’, in Wessel Stoker and W. L. van der Merwe (eds), *Looking Beyond? Shifting Views of Transcendence in Philosophy, Theology, Art, and Politics* (Amsterdam/New York: Rodopi 2012), pp. 413-429.

⁵⁶ Cf. Santoni, *Bad Faith, Good Faith, and Authenticity in Sartre’s Early Philosophy*, pp. 16-17.

Good faith and sincerity in *Infinite Jest*

As mentioned, the understanding of sincerity outlined in the previous section was partly prompted by considerations derived from *Infinite Jest*. Now that we have clearly outlined the concepts of good faith and sincerity, below we will examine their portrayal in the novel, through analyses of its most important characters—Mario, Gately and Hal.

Good faith: Mario Incandenza

When we read that Mario Incandenza ‘doesn’t seem to resemble much of anyone’, this might at first seem to refer solely to his physical appearance. But Mario’s not resembling anyone quickly turns out to refer to something deeper than his physique. Whereas everybody else ‘finds stuff that’s really real uncomfortable and they get embarrassed’, Mario is different and likes to visit Ennet House, the nearby halfway facility, because ‘it’s very real’. ‘People are crying and making noise and getting less unhappy, and once he heard somebody say *God* with a straight face and nobody looked at them [...] in any sort of way where you could tell they were worried inside.’⁵⁷ It is not Mario’s physical appearance but his utter lack of cynicism, his focus on ‘outside’—expressed through many passages like the above—that distinguishes him from everybody else in the novel.

Mario provides an alternative to the novel’s many cynical, depressed characters. Mentally, Mario is ‘slow’, ‘but *not*, verifiably *not*, retarded or cognitively damaged or bradyphrenic, more like refracted, almost, ever so slightly epistemically bent, a pole poked into mental water and just a little off and just taking a little bit longer’. Words like ‘bent’ and ‘off’ stress a deviation from the norm. Mario *is* a deviation, an abnormality: he stands for a different way of thinking about the self and its relation to the world, symbolizing the much-needed change that the rest of the novel illustrates. His younger brother Hal regards Mario as a ‘miracle’ and his mother Avril sees him as ‘the family’s real prodigy’.⁵⁸ Mario’s role is in many ways akin to that of an ‘angel’ or a ‘holy fool’.⁵⁹

That Mario—like angels and fools—is perhaps neurologically incapable of irony and cynicism, does not mean that his character cannot teach us

⁵⁷ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, pp. 101, 592, 591.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 314, 316, 317.

⁵⁹ Cf. Timothy Jacobs, ‘The Brothers Incandenza: Translating Ideology in Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* and David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*’, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language: A Journal of the Humanities* 49 (2007), p. 272.

anything valuable for overcoming the problems under consideration. His importance lies not in the (congenital) causes of his other way of thinking, but in its results, its consequences: he shows the structures of an alternative attitude, which regards the self as always already public and involved with others, and shows us that this life-view works. Mario functions as an exemplary character, demonstrating the immediate, intuitive adaptation of a life-view that other characters—most importantly, Gately and Hal—will only arrive at through a great deal of effort, through a route that requires reflection.

Another of Mario's characteristics that should arouse our interest, is that, despite being the novel's most empathetic character, always perceptive of other people's pain and suffering, Mario himself does not feel pain. He suffers from 'Familial Dysautonomia, a neurological deficit whereby he can't feel physical pain very well.'⁶⁰ We could disregard this as simply another addition to the long list of Mario's physical ailments. This neurological deficit, however, seems an unmistakable reference to Wittgenstein's so-called 'private language arguments', which focus repeatedly on the misguided conviction that the meaning of the utterance 'I am in pain' is determined by an individual's private sample (a memory, a mental image) of pain.⁶¹ Mario simply *cannot* base his conception of what pain is on a private sample of pain, because he feels no pain and thus cannot gaze inside and say 'this is pain'. Because of his neurological deficiency, Mario is immune to the self-reflective mistake of regarding inner processes as objects that an individual possesses and that only that individual can access as part of an immanent, inner process. Most other characters in *Infinite Jest* are subject to this illusion.⁶²

Mario's existence seems to be based on the intuitive awareness that the self is something that comes into being outside himself, not in some

⁶⁰ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 590.

⁶¹ Cf. Allard den Dulk, 'Wallace and Wittgenstein: Literature as Dialogue Concerning the Real World', in Sébastian Hüsch (ed.), *Philosophy and Literature and the Crisis of Metaphysics* (Würzburg: Verlag Königshausen & Neumann, 2011), pp. 343-358. There are significant parallels between Sartre's and Wittgenstein's views of self-consciousness and self-knowledge. For Sartre, too, the tendency to regard thoughts, feelings and 'character' as objects that we somehow possess inside ourselves, is a crucial mistake in how we view ourselves. For both, self-knowledge is not a result of consciousness looking at itself, as if it is an object, but of consciousness looking at its own relations to the world. Both Sartre and Wittgenstein regard self-consciousness as inextricably tied in with the world outside consciousness, a view which undermines the threat of solipsism. Cf. Kathleen Wider, 'Hell and the Private Language Argument: Sartre and Wittgenstein on Self-Consciousness, the Body, and Others', *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 18/2 (1987), pp. 120-132; Béatrice Longuenesse, 'Self-Consciousness and Self-Reference: Sartre and Wittgenstein', *European Journal of Philosophy* 16/1 (2008), pp. 1-21.

⁶² Cf. Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, pp. 692-693.

immanent, private sphere, but in what transcends his consciousness: in the world and through his actions. This seems to form an important aspect of his life-view. Mario is repeatedly described as ‘inclined ever forward’.⁶³ Again, at first this simply seems to be a reference to Mario’s physical abnormalities. However, as a result of this repeated emphasis, Mario’s ‘forward-inclination’ becomes more and more a characterization not just of his posture but also of his life-view. As Greg Carlisle observes: ‘[Mario is] able to choose, to contribute, not caught in a cycle of stasis and passivity.’⁶⁴ Other characters, such as the novel’s many drug addicts, *are* caught in such a cycle: they are empty shells, without real selves. Conversely, Mario is committed to the world outside, capable of acting and, therefore, of becoming a self.

As discussed earlier, Mario displays this behavior intuitively: he does not have to make any (reflective) effort to stay immune to the problems that affect other characters. In other words, his virtue is completely pre-reflective. In Mario, therefore, we encounter an embodiment of *good faith*, which contrasts sharply with the reflection-induced bad faith of most of the other characters. The fact that Mario does not feel pain symbolizes his innate immunity to the temptation of seeking all meaning inside himself, which would lead to bad faith; he does not find his self inside, but in his relations to the world and others. As a result, Mario is focused on what is ‘really real’, that is, he intuitively and honestly acknowledges what is really important. Instead of fleeing from the task of self-becoming, Mario takes on the reality of his existence. He succeeds in becoming a stable self because he is aware that the self is connected to the world outside consciousness and takes shape through actions. As such, Mario is the paragon of what it means to be human. He shows the reality and desirability of the virtue that he embodies, thereby functioning as an example to other characters who will strive for a similar attitude, who will reflectively grasp the insight of good faith. As such, Mario *is* good faith: he *is* the life-view that is resumed by others through reflection.

Sincerity: Don Gately and Hal Incandenza

Unlike Mario, Gately and Hal *do* struggle with excessive self-reflection, irony and cynicism, which can be regarded as examples of bad faith behavior. It is my contention that both characters undergo a development from these

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 313, 315.

⁶⁴ Greg Carlisle, *Elegant Complexity: A Study of David Foster Wallace’s Infinite Jest* (Los Angeles/Austin: SSMG Press, 2007), p. 199.

problems toward an attitude of sincerity. Below, I will first give a broad outline of Gately's relatively clear-cut development. Then, I will analyze Hal's more puzzling situation in further detail. Although Hal and Gately do not meet during the intervals of the story that the novel explicitly narrates, a meeting between the two characters in the missing intermediate year is suggested by a memory Hal has during the opening scene ('Donald Gately and I dig up my father's head') and a vision Gately has toward the end of the novel ('He dreams he's with a very sad kid and they're in a graveyard digging some dead guy's head up').⁶⁵

The most important aspect of Gately's development toward sincerity is the role AA plays in it. We have already seen that *Infinite Jest* portrays a society in which 'stuff that's really real', real emotions, grief and meaning, are regarded as outdated, as clichés that are to be ignored. AA forms an exception, as a community in which the importance of such clichés, of real things *is* pointed out.⁶⁶ What AA does, is bring fellow-sufferers together, see to it that they open themselves up, that they are honest with others—if only through that one sentence, 'I am an addict'—and, in the course of doing that, learn to be honest with themselves, and thus become selves.

Openness, sincerity and a stable self are not established instantly; they are gradually realized. These are things that AA members are encouraged to *do*, in the presence of each other. Initially the hyperreflexive, ironic mind of the addict regards AA's insights and guidelines as clichés (just like the 'real stuff' of existence, that the addicts have neglected for years and that has to be brought back into sight again by these guidelines), for as Gately observes: 'every one of the seminal little mini-epiphanies you have in early AA is always polyesterishly banal.' But, he continues: 'the thing is that the clichéd directives are a lot more deep and hard to actually *do*. To try and live by instead of just say.'⁶⁷ The attitude, and the resulting self, that AA strives toward, can only emerge from acts in the world, even though the start of such actions can only be dutiful, at best.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, pp. 18, 934.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 369.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 358, 273.

⁶⁸ Cf. 'It's called "Fake It Till You Make It"' (*Ibid.*, p. 369). We can connect this to Sartre's assertion that we can never 'believe what we believe': good faith means that we have to place trust in phenomena about which we cannot possibly acquire absolute certainty, such as friendship or the fact that AA works, but have to do so, based on signals that convince us that these things are in fact the case: in AA this means that a new member can recognize that this program might help him, as it seems to help others, but this does not yet take away his desperation concerning his own fate.

According to Gately, each AA insight or guideline initially incites aversion in the addict, because it seems such a ‘quilted-sampler-type cliché’.⁶⁹ ‘Just Do It’ and ‘Keep Coming’ are two of those clichéd guidelines, but everybody is encouraged to keep doing them, to keep coming, and ultimately see the real stuff behind the supposed clichés. This leads to Gately’s katharsis, one might say.⁷⁰ Gately is, as Bell and Dowling formulate it, the evident ‘hero’ of *Infinite Jest*, because of his ‘transformation of character in the months he has been free of his addiction and doing his best to aid other battered souls in their struggle with their own demons.’⁷¹ Gately is the ‘knight’ (one of his nicknames is ‘Sir Osis’) who, from a situation of addiction, develops into a stable self, an honest man who tries to form a meaningful life as a live-in staff member of Ennet House by helping others, counseling new residents during their recovery.

Whereas Gately’s situation during the novel is quite clear, interpreting Hal’s development is anything but simple. In *Infinite Jest*’s opening scene (and, chronologically, the last episode of the story line), Hal, at that moment seen from his own first-person perspective, seems quite normal. However, the admission committee of the University of Arizona perceives him as animal-like, primitive, and damaged. This contradiction leaves it up to the reader to decide what kind of state Hal is in, here, at the end of the story line. Judging by the reactions from the people around him, there is something wrong with Hal; several possible causes are alluded to in the novel. However, what these tentative suggestions can make us lose sight of, is the possibility that Hal, compared with how he is in the rest of the novel, is actually getting better. Interpreting this will depend partly on how one judges Hal’s surroundings, the cultural context described in the novel; for it is this context that determines the perception of Hal as suffering from some sort of fundamental defect.

In some ways, Hal is an extraordinary, abnormal character—a prodigy in both sport and academic study—but in many respects Hal is also utterly normal: his addiction, and accompanying hyperreflexivity and endless irony, are typical of the society portrayed in *Infinite Jest*. The first part of Hal’s

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 446.

⁷⁰ Cf. ‘after maybe five months Gately [...] all of a sudden realized that quite a few days had gone by since he’d even thought of Demerol or Talwin or even weed. [...] He was, in a way, Free. It was the first time he’d been out of this kind of mental cage since he was maybe ten’ (Ibid., pp. 467–468).

⁷¹ Robert H. Bell and William Dowling, *A Reader’s Companion to Infinite Jest* (Bloomington: Xlibris, 2005), pp. 95–96.

story line contains many descriptions of the gravity of his addiction, and the accompanying state of ‘Analysis-Paralysis’.⁷²

When Hal decides to quit marijuana, he confesses his former drug use and his fear of the impending withdrawal symptoms to his brother Mario, and asks him for help:

‘I feel a hole. It’s going to be a huge hole, in a month. [...] And the hole’s going to get a little bigger every day until I fly apart in different directions. [...] I do not know what to do.’

‘Hal, if I tell you the truth, will you get mad and tell me be a fucking?’

‘I trust you. You’re smart, Boo.’

‘Then Hal?’

‘Tell me what I should do.’

‘I think you just did it. What you should do. I think you just did.’

‘...’

‘Do you see what I mean?’⁷³

This confession and call for help indicate an unprecedented open-heartedness on Hal’s part.⁷⁴ This might be part of what is described as the ‘whole new Hal, a Hal who does not get high, or hide, a Hal who in 29 days is going to hand his own personal urine over to authority figures with a wide smile and exemplary posture and not a secretive thought in his head.’⁷⁵

Shortly after his confession to Mario, Hal starts to narrate from a first-person perspective and, chronologically speaking, keeps on doing so.⁷⁶ Up to that moment Hal’s perspective has always been rendered in the third-person, or Hal has been described from the third-person perspective of other characters. We can regard the fact that Hal starts narrating in the first-person as a sign of the fact that Hal starts to develop a self.

However, at the same moment that Hal starts to narrate in first-person, other characters start asking him whether there is something wrong, and Hal has no idea what they are talking about. The others perceive Hal as having a constant ‘hilarity face’, and either ask why he is crying or why he is laughing, while he thinks he is doing neither.⁷⁷ This discrepancy in (self)perception is

⁷² E.g. Wallace, *Infinite Jest*, p. 334.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 785.

⁷⁴ E.g. *Ibid.*, p. 852.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 635.

⁷⁶ Starting at: *Ibid.*, p. 851.

⁷⁷ E.g. *Ibid.*, pp. 865, 875-876. Cf. the ‘whole new Hal[s]’ ‘wide smile’ noted above; also see below for a comparison with Mario and his ‘involuntarily constant smile’.

at its most extreme in the opening scene. Hal, via his first-person perspective, seems normal and thinks: 'I believe I appear neutral, maybe even pleasant.' But when he tries to express what he thinks and feels, the admission committee perceives his facial expression as 'animal-like' and 'contorted', and his voice as a hysterical, terrifying scream.⁷⁸

The novel then describes the build-up to this opening scene. The question 'What happened to / is wrong with Hal?' is one of *Infinite Jest's* main narrative threads, but the novel offers no explicit answer. Two possible explanations—use of the drug DMZ or having watched the film *'Infinite Jest'*—imply that such an event has taken place in the intervening year that the novel does not describe; these explanations are therefore the most mysterious, as well as the most sensationalist (potent drug! fatal film!). As such they are very much in line with the techniques of the commercial, addictive entertainment culture that the novel criticizes, and should therefore perhaps not be taken too seriously. Moreover, the supposed symptoms of what is potentially wrong with Hal have started before this time, before he might have seen the film or used the drug.

Another possibility is that Hal, who is repeatedly described as suffering from anhedonia (characterized as a mild form of depression), has sunk into in a deeper, clinical form of depression. Hal displays several striking similarities to Kate Gompert, a character described as suffering from clinical depression. Several descriptions of her facial expression call to mind those of Hal's 'hilarity-face'.⁷⁹ Another similarity is that both Kate and Hal are not just addicted to marijuana, but also to the secrecy surrounding their use of it.⁸⁰ However, there are also unmistakable and crucial differences between Kate's depression and Hal's situation. The incomprehendedness that Kate describes as connected to depression—'Classic unipolars were usually tormented by the conviction that no one else could hear or understand them when they tried to communicate'—perhaps calls to mind Hal's incomprehendedness (for instance, vis-à-vis the admission committee). But Hal's situation, here, is opposite to Kate's. Kate is completely absorbed by the psychic pain she experiences, and consequently is incapable of the empathy that is needed to explain herself to other people. Hal, on the other hand, makes frantic efforts to explain who he is, what he feels and what he deems important. For example, when before the admission committee, he says: 'I am not just a boy who plays tennis. I have an intricate history. Experiences and feelings. I'm complex.'⁸¹

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 3, 12.

⁷⁹ Cf. Ibid., p. 76.

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 695, 77, 49.

⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 75, 696, 11, 12.

These statements fit the development, discussed above, in which Hal becomes increasingly aware of his own feelings, starts to open up and become a self.

Instead of assuming that something is wrong with Hal, we could turn the diagnosis around: *Infinite Jest* describes a society in which a lot is clearly amiss, and it is in this society that Hal has grown up: ‘We are shown how to fashion masks of ennui and jaded irony at a young age [...] And then it’s stuck there, the weary cynicism that saves us from gooey sentiment and unsophisticated naïveté.’ In his cynical contempt for a self that gives sincere expression to its thoughts and emotions, the old Hal complies perfectly with what is normal within the described culture: ‘One of the really American things about Hal, probably, is the way he despises what he is really lonely for: this hideous internal self, incontinent of sentiment and need, that pules and writhes under the hip empty mask, anhedonia.’⁸² Hal’s disgust is described as a ‘fear of being really human, since to be really human (at least as he conceptualizes it) is probably to be unavoidably sentimental and naïve and goo-prone and generally pathetic’. He regards it as being childlike and underdeveloped (the self is ‘incontinent’, it ‘pules’ and ‘writhes’, looking deformed and hideous): ‘[to be really human] is to be in some basic interior way forever infantile, some sort of not-quite-right-looking infant dragging itself anaclitically around the map, with big wet eyes and froggy-soft skin, huge skull, gooey drool.’⁸³

These descriptions call to mind Mario, who is described as ‘at 18+ in a range somewhere between elf and jockey’, dragging himself along ‘in the sort of lurchy stumble of a vaudeville inebriate’, and having a ‘[large but] withered-looking head’, ‘khaki-colored skin, an odd dead gray-green that [...] [gave him] an almost uncannily reptilian/dinosaurian look’. Additionally, Mario has an ‘involuntarily constant smile’; compare this to Hal’s hilarity-face and the description of the ‘whole new Hal’ who does not do drugs anymore and submits his own urine ‘with a wide smile’. Mario’s sincerity is regarded by the rest of society as a lack of development and sophistication, as some sort of awful handicap. Primitive and hideous is also how Hal is perceived in the opening scene of the book: he fills the members of the admission committee with horror.⁸⁴

Accordingly, we can perhaps conclude that there is nothing wrong with Hal, but that a change has taken place, from self-reflective irony and cynicism to an openness, to the formation of a self—a change the rest of the novel

⁸² Ibid., pp. 694, 695.

⁸³ Ibid., pp. 694-695.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 216, 313, 154, 314, 12, 14; also, in this scene Hal calls himself an ‘infantophile’, a term capturing the negative perception the desire for sincerity and spontaneity, as felt by the outside world, but at that point not by Hal himself anymore (Ibid., p. 16).

illustrates the desirability of—and conclude that there is something wrong with the society that is horrified by him.⁸⁵

Catherine Nichols writes the following about Hal and Gately: ‘the trajectory of their transformation is one of restoring personal agency by turning the self inside-out rather than suppressing it beneath deliberate artifice.’⁸⁶ Gately and Hal gradually open themselves up to the world around them, instead of remaining confined in themselves. In Gately’s case, we can see that AA makes him open up and be honest, to others and to himself. This does not happen automatically: it requires a (reflective) decision from the addict to act according to the guidelines, which can be regarded as a reminder of good faith insights. AA brings about a *pure reflection* in Gately: its guidelines, constituting the formation of the self, are taken on by Gately in his actions in AA and in Ennet House; his transformation is based on adopting these insights through a process of reflection.

Hal undergoes a similar development, although it seems crucial that whereas Gately is part of a community of fellow-sufferers, Hal is alone, facing the ironic community from which he has detached himself. This can also explain the contrast between the clarity of Hal’s internal monologue and the complete lack of understanding of his words by the people around him. Hal’s development to the attitude of sincerity is connected to a change in language-games, in communities of language and meaning, into which he has become initiated at the time of the opening scene (perhaps via Gately and Mario). And as a result, he seems more at ease with his new self than a year earlier, in the scenes at the end of the book. However, most people around him are not familiar with the language-game of sincerity, and therefore do not understand him, and get the impression that he is uttering primitive drivel. Therefore, it might seem as if Hal, in the end, is still (or even more deeply) confined in himself; but this could be explained by the fact that he has no support network, that other people are still missing from what we get to see of Hal’s life—that he may, in fact, be on the right path.

From the moment of his confession and call for help to Mario, Hal opens up and acknowledges the importance of the other in judging and becoming who you are. Hal’s transition is prompted by the reflective realization (*pure reflection*) that Mario’s good faith gives him a better understanding of himself, reality, and other people. The encounter with Gately, who has after all gained a similar understanding, may also have contributed to that. Hal decides (that

⁸⁵ In Hal’s self-explanation to the committee we can read a rejection of the ironic, postmodernist conception of the self, when Hal says: ‘I’m not just a creātus, manufactured, conditioned, bred for a function’ (Ibid., p. 12).

⁸⁶ Catherine Nichols, ‘Dialogizing Postmodern Carnival: David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest*’, *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 43/1 (2001), p. 13.

is, through a voluntary act) that the intuition he has about what it means to be, as he formulates it himself, 'really human' (open, vulnerable, et cetera) is true and desirable, and he chooses to live according to this insight. And as such he becomes a *sincere* self.

Conclusion

In this article, the Sartrean view of consciousness served to clarify the role of sincerity in *Infinite Jest*, while at the same time Wallace's novel served to point out and correct both Sartre's own, as well as the more general, philosophical misconception of the phenomenon of sincerity. We have seen that *good faith* is the pre-reflective awareness and acceptance of human-reality, as the need to become a self in connection to the world outside consciousness, by 'existing' the tension between transcendence and facticity. *Sincerity* consists of resuming this awareness reflectively, through a 'pure reflection', which implies grasping oneself without depriving consciousness of its spontaneity and directedness at the world. Mario Incandenza has been analyzed as a paragon of good faith, who, through his intuitive awareness of the task of self-becoming, functions as an exemplary character demonstrating a life-view that other characters are subsequently shown to arrive at through a more difficult, reflected route. The attitude of sincerity was analyzed through the cases of Don Gately and Hal Incandenza. *Infinite Jest* shows these characters overcoming their reflexive-ironic attitude, by realizing the transcendent character of the self; they show that, to achieve a meaningful existence, consciousness has to be connected to the world outside itself.

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