**Does Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac, as Kierkegaard understands it, exemplify the “sternly optimistic” acceptance of responsibility that Sartre describes in “Existentialism Is a Humanism”? Why or why not?**

Kierkegaard’s understanding of Abraham’s sacrifice does not exemplify Sartre’s notion of existential freedom because Sartre believes that we are free beings, with no excuses, and we have dignity, freedom, and responsibility. Kierkegaard uses faith, in alignment with Sartre’s view, as an excuse in which does not exemplify Sartre’s optimism.

Kierkegaard understands Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice Isaac in the way in which we are upheld to a moral system where murder is wrong and unethical, then the conclusion is such that Abraham is a bad person. However, Abraham is regarded as someone who is ethical. Kierkegaard says that there is, a higher power than the ethical—faith. Abraham is told to sacrifice Isaac to God, and he does because he has faith.

Sartre, in his idea of why existentialism is sternly optimistic reproaches both the Christians and the communists. The communists believe that existentialism is quietism; it disengages with humanity. The Christians believe that existentialism is pessimistic. Sartre reproach, refutes this by saying existentialism in inherently optimistic because existentialists are not quiet, in fact they do engage with humanity and they are not pessimistic, they are optimistic in their belief in themselves and their own will. Sartre, also, in response to the Christians, justifies optimism by illustrating that we, as humans, have anguish, abandonment, and despair. These three terms construct Sartre’s idea of freedom.

Anguish is the awareness. Sartre explains anguish is to be conscious and aware of the responsibility that all of mankind hangs on your individual choices. Anguish is the consciousness of the extent of responsibility in choice that affects all of humanity. It is the idea that all of mankind hangs on each individual’s choices and it is the awareness of that. This does not compliment Sartre’s idea of optimism because Abraham lacks awareness of his responsibility for mankind. Sacrifice is only okay in the particularity of this case. Sartre would believe Kierkegaard creates the excuse of faith in God, to excuse Abraham from his actions in the particularity of his case. However, anguish is the awareness that every choice is responsible for mankind and by generalizing it would then excuse Abraham, going against Sartre’s idea of anguish.

Abandonment is responsibility and it comes from when our excuses have abandoned us. We can no longer rely on excuses, such as God, for our failure to take responsibility. Sartre would not have believed that Abraham had been abandoned under Kierkegaard’s understanding because Abraham had faith in God and was putting his responsibility in God. Abraham was using his faith as excuse to sacrifice his son and therefore was not practicing free will or responsibility for his actions. Kierkegaard’s understanding of Abraham’s decision does not exemplify Sartre’s idea of abandonment because he was using his faith in God as an excuse to abandon the ethical and therefore had failed to take responsibility for it.

Despair is then the self-reliance it takes to then only put our will into our individual self, not into all the excuses. No one can guarantee that your efforts will work out for the best; it is up to the individual. According to Kierkegaard, Abraham did not depend on himself. He placed faith in God to take care of the future and trusted God through his sacrifice of his son. In this way Kierkegaard has exemplified how Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son was a direct result of his faith in God, not due to his own self-reliance.

In conclusion, Kierkegaard understands Abraham to have faith in God and therefore it does not exemplify the optimism of existentialism due to Sartre’s idea of freedom in anguish, abandonment, and despair.

**Why does Levinas think that it’s impossible to murder someone? According to him, would Heidegger agree?**

Levinas believes that it impossible to murder someone because he believes in encountering people as people, instead of as objects. When you relate to someone face-to-face it is impossible to kill the person due to relativity. There is a factor of self that is involved because when you relate someone to yourself, you can’t kill the other person without killing yourself. In this way, you are encountering them in a different way in which is inhumane. In this sense it is comparable to the Heideggerian way, because he sees people as part of the “they”, not in their specificity.

Anything that comes in front of you, you can murder it in its own sense. You are incorporating a donut into your system if you eat it. Heidegger is correct—we are being in the world. So, whenever we treat anything as the being that it is, we are metabolizing as that we are being in the world, which is called consumption, or violence. Even if you say no to it, you are incorporating it into the overall system by bringing it under a concept of being. By making it conform to your system, you are being towards violent it. But when you find “the other”, the other person resists assimilation into the horizon of being. Not because you can’t kill their body but because when you eat the body of the person, you don’t eat the person. You eat the body. There is a distinction between body and being (i.e. person). You are not prepared for what they are in virtue of what you are.

The process of relating to another person is not already prepared for you. The other person is a being, but as you relate to the other person, you do not relate by way of the concept of being. Unlike a donut, an object in which you relate to it by way of the concept of donut. If you relate to a person by any third concept, then that is what is wrong with prejudice even if its true, you are not relating to the person, you relating to them as a fact in terms of being. Anything you could murder you are relating to in terms of being, but the “Other” you cannot relate to in terms of being. You cannot kill the person at the same time as you are relating to the person. You are not killing a person; instead you are killing some physical manifestation of their body. To bring something under your power is to bring something under the concept of being. For example, when you understand the cactus, you make it stand under your frame of reference, but you don’t do that with the other. You submit your understanding to the other; what counts as having the interface is to submit your thoughts to the other person in which you are with dialogue.

Levinas shows us that we can’t understand the “Other” and because we cannot understand the “Other”, we cannot murder the other as it reduces another human to means of an object to be manipulated. And because of this, Heidegger would disagree. Heidegger believes the “Other” is still just in practicing fundamental ontology, so the human could be killed. Levinas does not believe Heidegger makes the distinction between the abstract of being and the relations of actual beings, so Heidegger would believe that being can be murdered without this distinction.

In conclusion, Heidegger and Levinas have opposing views on being and death and Heidegger disagrees with Levinas’s denial of murder. Levinas, by believing in the “Other”, does not believe that one can murder because it places another person as an object to be understood. So although one may wish to murder and although one may murder a boy, Levinas does not believe you can murder someone.

**Explain how Levinas uses the imagery of a “horizon” to characterize Heidegger’s idea of “fundamental ontology.” Why does he say that fundamental ontology treats every other being like food?**

For Heidegger, to place something on the horizon of being is to understand something for what it is—practicing ontology. To Heidegger, ontology is fundamental. In every interaction, in every relation, ontology is and should be occurring. Heidegger’s theory is comprised of comprehension of self in relation to the world. Fundamental ontology allows this to happen when it attempts to define another human being through understanding of self being and for Heidegger, this means to place it on the horizon of being. This turns a human being into an object, which Levinas does not agree with. He uses the image of the horizon to refute Heidegger’s view of fundamental ontology in order to exemplify why fundamental ontology is like treating every other being like food. People resist assimilation to being put on the horizon. Levinas states, “The understanding of a being will thus consist in going beyond the being, into the *openness,* and in perceiving it *within the horizon of being”* (Levinas 5).

For Levinas, the way in which we relate to people is not to practice ontology. It is through the ethical and religion. The religion, in Levinas terminology is, in essence, when we can comprehend others as we treat them as a conversational partner, which in itself it is to treat the specific human in their specific human-ness. The other human being is first a partner and we cannot put them on the horizon on being in the way that Heidegger attempts to. Levinas believes that by doing this we are seeing them as a cluster of traits instead of as a conversational partner. He believes that we should not be interacting with another human through way of the intellectual, instead in way of communication. Our job, as humans, is not to understand or comprehend another on terms of the horizon, meaning to practice ontology. It is instead to see them as someone in which to communicate with. This means that Levinas does not believe ontology is fundamental. He uses the image of the horizon to show that what lies on the horizon of being is limits of knowledge. Another person, however, is something that cannot be understood like an object and to reduce it as such is unethical and in this way, it is beyond the horizon of being’s comprehension. The image of the horizon therefore compromises Heidegger’s use of fundamental ontology.

Fundamental ontology treats every other being like food because consuming is a metaphor for making them part of the world instead of seeing them in their own individuality. A food is not a being—it just food that is consumed. Fundamental ontology does not describe a human as an individual with specificity; it is instead appearing as though to be an object and treated as such, just as though a food would be consumed.

**How, according to Camus, has Sisyphus subverted the gods’ intentions in condemning him to roll a rock forever?**

To subvert is to undermine power and authority. The gods intended for Sisyphus to suffer when they condemned him to rolling a rock up a hill forever. They wanted it to be a punishment for Sisyphus; to make him miserable. According to Camus, the way to subvert the gods was for Sisyphus was not to be miserable. In order to understand how Sisyphus subverted the gods’ intentions, one must understand Camus’s version of tragedy and version of joy. According to Camus, when Sisyphus experiences joy—instead of misery—by accepting his reality, he can subvert the gods.

If a situation is tragic it is because an individual has awareness of the fact that they are in turmoil over the situation and are upset. There is a link between consciousness and tragedy; it is an essential ingredient. For example, if a natural disaster occurs in a remote area that affects no one and is unknown, can it be considered a tragedy? No one has been displaced; no one is aware that a disaster has occurred. With no one aware of a bad situation it is not a tragedy because tragedy and awareness are linked. Consciousness is the awareness of the difficulty of the situation. However, in Sisyphus’s case, if he was only aware of the difficulty of the situation, the gods would have gotten what they wanted—for him to miserable and punished.

According to Camus, once you have this awareness of tragedy you then can obtain joy. There is the situation in which one is genuinely in and then there are situations that one desires—the real situation and the unreal situations. When an individual compares the current situation to the desired situation, that is when one surrenders to misery. One will obviously crave the seemingly better scenario. This craving is an obstacle in which there is an ability to acknowledge the reality of your situation. Craving these other possible scenarios leaves one stuck inside the depth of the tragedy and makes the individual incapable of appropriating the reality of the genuine situation. It is more than awareness of the situation; it is truly owning one’s reality. It comes down to being presented with two options: to stay stuck in tragedy or to acknowledge the present situation.

So, how does Sisyphus achieve joy when condemned putting his entire being into a task that achieves nothing? He must acknowledge, fully embrace, and accept the reality of the situation. Once one truly acknowledges the situation and stops comparing it to better realities, one can begin to experience joy—“crushing truths perish from being acknowledged” (Camus 377). Camus uses crushes to explain how heart breaking the truth is, but this crushing perishes with acknowledgment because the individual faces their reality, no longer trapped in misery and tragedy. By doing this and experiencing the freedom from tragedy, one can experience joy. People tend to become stuck in their misery, but they have yet to recognize the relevant reality or their situation, keeping them miserable. When Sisyphus takes control of his destiny of rolling the rock up and down the hill and gives away the notion of his previous life, he is opened to determining his own fate and, in turn, his own responsibility of finding joy.

**To what extent is it possible, according to Heidegger, to live a life free from the influence of the “they”?**

According to Heidegger, it is impossible to fully live a life free from the “they”. There is no quantitative number to which we can determine the extent of the influence; it is more of a spectrum.

Heidegger developed a concept in which he refers to as the “they”. The “they” can be compared to as a set of social norms; doing what one does the way the one does it. It refers to no one in particular, in fact that is its premise. The “they” does not specify each individual being’s individuality, allowing every being to be integrated into the world without distinction. According to Heidegger, in order to understand an individual, they must be understood in context of the “they”. Every being is the “they”. Heidegger believes that comprehension of being occurs beyond the particular, where we do not comprehend any human as more than the “they”. In order to understand an individual, they must be understood in terms of the “they”.

Escaping the “they” is impossible and because the “they” is an everyday being with one another, one must still live in confines of the “they”. The “they” is how self being is infiltrated amongst others in everydayness. This being said, self-being is integrated into the “they” and cannot break free from the “they” entirely. In other words, the self of the everyday being is “they-self”. This becomes important in the distinction between “they-self”, a part of the "they”, and a being’s authentic self, their own self within the “they”.

Though interconnected and unable to completely separate, a distinction can be made between the “they” and one’s authentic sense of self. Once a being is aware that they are and cannot break from the “they”, the being is then able to figure their own sense of self, which proves to be authentic. It is worth noting that when an individual removes himself or herself from the “they”, in order to give themselves an authentic sense of self, then they are faced with the totality of being. This leads to anxiety and dread because you are exposed to the totality of being as strange. While living within the confines of the “they” and no authenticity or specificity, it is impossible to understand the strangeness of being which is important in creating specificity. To further exemplify authenticity and it’s connection to the “they”, it is impossible to be authentic without having an entity, the “they”, to compare your authenticity to.

In conclusion, the “they” is impossible to escape from, because we are all the “they”, but we can be a part of the “they” without our being the “they”. Becoming authentic allows us to further ourselves from the masses of the “they” and lessen their influence though we cannot ever fully separate ourselves from the influence of the “they”. Once we acknowledge that the “they” exists and we cannot escape its confines, we are able to separate ourselves enough to be with the “they”, not of the “they”.

**Does Levinas’s criticism of “fundamental ontology” also undermine Murdoch’s conception of an ethical life as requiring loving attention? Why or why not?**

Yes, Levinas’s criticism undermines Murdoch’s conception of an ethical life. Levinas’s main point and criticism of fundamental ontology is that it is not. He believes that ontology should only be applied in situations at which the interaction occurs between a being and an object. This theory excludes another being as an interaction in which ontology is fundamental. Levinas is, by saying this, exemplifying that other humans shouldn’t place someone on the horizon of being because it makes them out to be an object at which they are not. However, Murdoch’s conception of an ethical lifestyle requires what she calls loving attention—the period in which we can change our inner perception of others and how to attend to another person. She is saying that it is up to our perception to change and understand another for who they really are, which is really more along the lines of Heidegger, not Levinas.

In Levinas’s exception of fundamental ontology, he claims that the “Other” is first and foremost a conversational partner, not another object to be able to manipulate. He in fact claims in a quite a matter of fact tone, “The relation to the “Other” is not ontology” (Levinas 7). He does not believe that another human can be treated as anything less than such and must be understood in terms of conversation. Levinas wants us to comprehend someone as a conversational partner first and conversation must come before understanding, even without physical speech. You do not need to speak to have a conversation, just a face-to-face encounter; a face speaks without verbalizing. Murdoch though, says that loving attention can be done on the individual’s own terms. She believes that, from loving attention, one can change perception of another and that it is possible to do so without ever speaking to the one in which is being perceived. Through this point, it is clear they are not in agreement. Levinas thinks conversation is fundamental in order to understand while Murdoch believes the understanding and perception can occur completely on one’s own account. Murdoch says that loving attention can be done on the own without any lack of intervening into the world. Levinas believes that we are to interact with the world in order to understand it and that it is our moral duty and the basis of ethics to see each person as a conversational partner and interlocker. Murdoch’s version of ethics is to justly see what the other human is by way of changing one’s own perception.

This can be exemplified through Murdoch’s story of M and D. M and D can no longer converse because D may be dead. And once D is presumed to be dead, M can continue to nurture inner work, loving attention, and perception even though there is no longer a conversational aspect to their relationship. D cannot do anything to change M’s perception—Murdoch believes that this is entirely M’s job to do. According to Levinas, both others must be present in order to converse, the main baseline of ethics and understanding.

In conclusion, Levinas would argue that it is impossible to accomplish Murdoch’s loving attention for two reasons: one, there is no second partner to be in conversation with, and two, it is not an inner working that develops perceptions, it is a conversation to be had between two interlockers.

**Pick two of the philosophers we have studied and explain what they have to say about nerds. What are nerds getting wrong in the way they live their lives and relate to other people?**

Both Nietzsche and Heidegger speak on nerds and examine what is wrong about they way, in which, nerds interact with other people. Nietzsche uses nerds as a tool to talk about Christianity and Heidegger uses nerds to exemplify curiosity. Nerds are people who break things down into components instead of for experience. Their goal is to understand through way of analyzing and their relation to the world is through means of intelligence.

First, Nietzsche believes Christianity is a disease so in using nerds as a tool to examine Christians and their beliefs, he is exemplifying that nerds are not living their lives in the correct manner. It can be in comparison to the stereotypes there are in a high school—jocks, cheerleaders, stupid people, geeks, nerds, teacher’s pets, etc. The jocks, cheerleaders, and stupid people were the most popular. The nerds, the geeks, and the teacher’s pets were the least popular. Then, for whatever reason there was a shift in the food chain, and suddenly it was no longer cool to be stupid; being a nerd was popular. This is what Nietzsche explains happened with Christianity. Winners and losers switch roles when Christianity comes into play. Prior to Christianity, people who were power, strong, rich, etc. were the ones who had all the power; the ones at the top of social food chain. However, as Christianity became relevant, the people who adopted this concept were those who were less powerful. These were the nerds. They needed something that would put them in competition with the rich and powerful, so they used Christianity as a tool to move higher up in social status. Therefore Nietzsche uses nerds as example of living incorrectly. Believing in Christianity, a sickness in the eyes of Nietzsche, is incorrect. It is the need to justify the way to understand thing instead of just letting be. Instead Nietzsche suggests we allow for open interpretation and “style”.

Second, Heidegger uses curiosity to exemplify how nerds are too worried about the wrong thing—they are concerned with whether something is or is not, instead of the more relevant question of how something is or is not. According to Heidegger curiosity has been misunderstood; it is the primacy of sight over the other senses and that which is a natural desire of humans. For Heidegger, curiosity is the feature of a human in which they seek to gain knowledge in order to understand his or herself and for their own benefit. He believes that instead, curiosity should be used in a different way than the nerds use curiosity, which is to marvel at something or another. Curiosity should not used to analyze and deconstruct meanings, especially in context of God. Instead, we should be curious about the strangeness of being because this leads to motivation of understanding for the right reasons. It is not whether or not there is a God but instead how is God.

In conclusion, both Nietzsche and Heidegger use the term “nerds” as a tool to explain why looking at things analytically is the incorrect way to be thinking.

**Why is it relevant to Murdoch's story of M and D that D may be dead? How does this fact help ensure that the story counts as a clear counter-example to the “picture of man” Murdoch opposes?**

The clear counter example to the “picture of man” is directed towards Sartre’s view on man and the story is relevant for Murdoch to disprove him in order to show an alternative account for freedom.

Sartre believes that the self equals the acts of will; the doer is the deed. He describes a picture of a timeline with points spaced across time. Each individual point is an individual willful action that the doer does. Sartre believes that the individual is each point’s willful intervention and all the individual is comprised of is the set of all of these willful actions. For Sartre, freedom is this—choosing what to will. Freedom, to Sartre, is a property of will and what it is to will freely is to choose. In order to be free, it must be unexcused. The individual did it; nothing made his or her do the deed. These willful actions that Sartre explains is an individual reaching out and interacting with the world. Each point on the timeline is an interaction with the rest of the world in which to demonstrate freedom.

Murdoch opposes this with her story of M and D in order to offer an alternative account to freedom. Murdoch uses Sartre’s timeline to explain that the space between these points do, in fact, account for something. In the space between these willful actions, Murdoch claims that there is much work to be done in which she calls loving attention. Loving attention is how to attend to and conceive another person. This idea of having work to do in between willful acts is the basis for Murdoch’s counter to Sartre.

The quiet inner work that occurs as loving attention happens in between willful actions are just as important. Inner work is truly that, work; an activity that is being engaged with. This kind of agency is not modeled on Sartre’s view of freedom because he believes that individuals are nothing in between willful acts. Murdoch believes that in between we, as humans, should be alternating our perceptions. It is in this inner work that Murdoch believes we find freedom. We are becoming free from misconceptions. This inner work is not a property of will, it is something that occurs in the in between and freedom can be found there. Murdoch uses the story of M and D to explain how M alters her perception of D.

As M alters her perception of D, she is trying to see her for what she really is. What M is trying to do is to see her accurately or justly. Freedom is suddenly jumping to the next act of free will. Instead freedom is “the function of the progressive attempt” to see an object more clearly (Murdoch 23). This means that Murdoch sees freedom as infinitely perfectible. By loving attention, you are manifesting agency in the space between acts of will which is a much different way to see freedom then the way Sartre thinks of it.

It is relevant that D could be dead because then M cannot act upon D, however M is still able to change her perception of D. Inner work does not involve interaction with any other being besides yours. Loving attention comes from inside of the individual, not in their interactions with another. M is acting upon her perception of D and those perceptions lived longer than D did. Also, it is not possible to D to have done anything to make M’s view and perception change because she may be dead. Only M can change her perception internally. D has not done the perspective change—that comes from within M. Therefore, it does not require any interaction between the correspondents. For Sartre, all activity is reaching out into the world to interact and manipulate. His whole view on freedom is it a willful act that goes out into the world. Murdoch suggests that the freedom can come from within in the form of loving attention.