

### Entering the Garden of Your Mind

I'm walking in an unfamiliar city and stumble into a public park called "Sartre's Garden." There's a hedge maze with a sign that reads: *The Exit Strategy — Can you find your way out?* The maze isn't just a puzzle. It's built around individual choices. Every turn and corner presents a risk: one path might hide a trap door and punish carelessness; another path might hide stairs that let you climb up, see the maze differently, and move forward with clarity. The whole game is about navigation, decision points, and consequences.

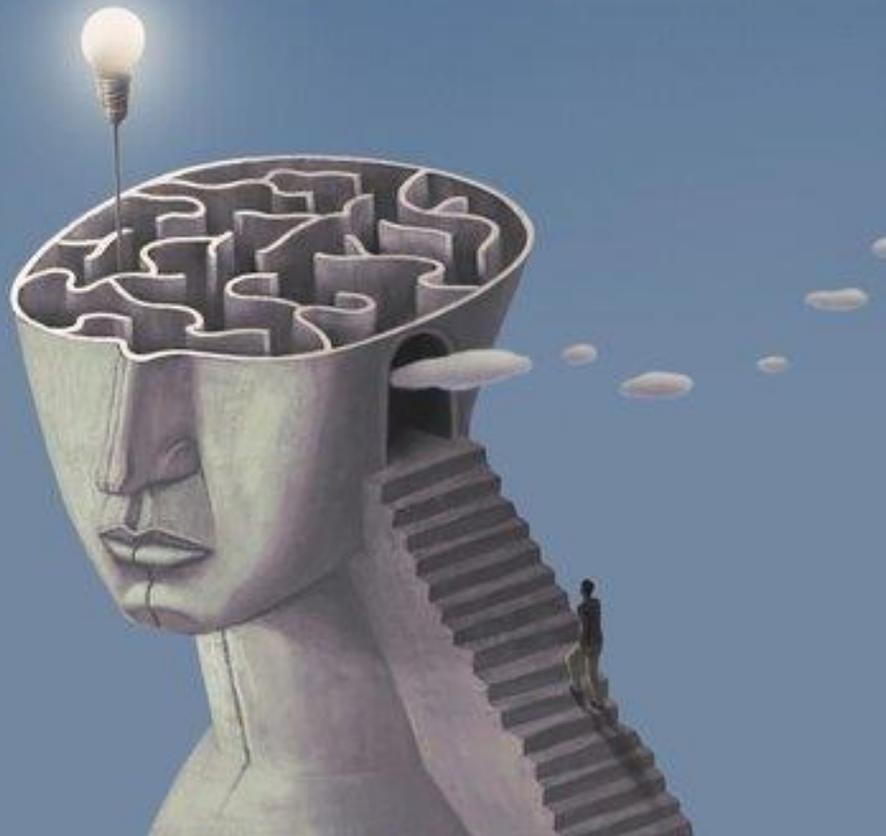
But through Sartre's lens, the maze stops being entertainment and starts looking like a metaphor for human life. There isn't a single glowing path marked "correct" or "successful." There are only options, uncertainty, and the fact that I still must pick a direction and make a choice.

The key question it raises:

When life doesn't hand you a clear "right answer," how do you choose authentically, and take responsibility, without hiding behind excuses, fear, or social scripts?

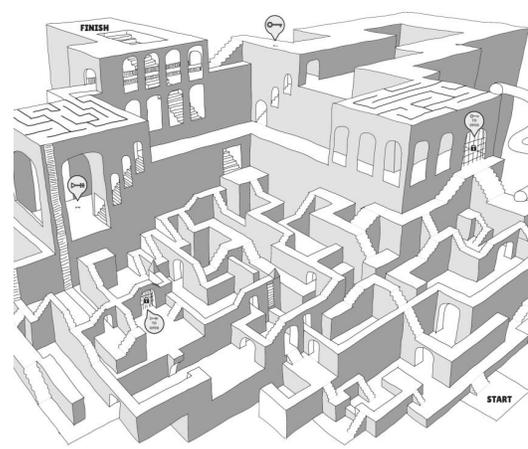
That question matters because real life has a lot of situations that feel like this maze: career decisions, family responsibilities, moral tradeoffs, moments where every option costs something. The pressure isn't only about picking the best outcome. It's also about being able to look at yourself afterward and say, "That choice was mine."

# Exit Strategy: Making Decisions Without Bad Faith



# The Maze = Life Experiences

- Within The Maze, there are many routes and decisions to be made, these decisions are principles of **Anguish, Bad Faith, Responsibility, and Perspective**. Choices we are committed and fully responsible to making and accepting throughout our lives.
- **Sartre's approach: freedom that can't be escaped.**
- Sartre's first principle hits like a hard truth: "Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself." (Sartre, 1946/1989, p. 22) I become who I am through decisions, especially when it would be easier to drift. We write our own stories as we move through life on our own paths.
- Sartre's idea "man is condemned to be free; because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does" (Sartre, 1946/1989, p. 29) makes sense to me. It doesn't mean freedom feels fun. It means I can't avoid choosing. Even refusing to choose is a choice. Even staying in a situation because it's familiar is a decision that carries responsibility.
- This is where the maze's metaphor becomes sharp: the maze doesn't care if I'm anxious. It still asks: left or right?
- Sartre also talks about **anguish**, and I think people misunderstand that word. It isn't just fear of being wrong. It's the realization that my choice isn't only personal. When I choose, I'm implicitly saying: *"This is what I believe a human being should do in this kind of situation."* That's why he argues we "choose for all mankind." Not because we literally legislate for everyone, but because choosing always carries an implied value judgment. My action becomes a statement about what I think counts as meaningful, decent, or worth doing.
- "There is no human nature, because there is no God to conceive it." (Sartre, 1946/1989, p. 28)
- So the weight isn't: "What if I fail?"  
The deeper weight is: **"What kind of person am I building by choosing this?"**



# The Dungeon of Bad Faith (and how it shows up in real life)

- If the maze has a trap door, for Sartre that trap door is **bad faith**; the move where I try to escape responsibility by pretending that I don't have freedom.

- Bad faith can sound like:

“I had no choice.”

“That’s just how it is.”

“I’m just the kind of person who does this.”

“I’m only doing what everyone expects.”

The reason it’s tempting is obvious: it reduces guilt, pressure, and uncertainty. If I can convince myself the maze forced me, then I don’t have to own the turn I took.

- But my experience lines up with Sartre here: most of the time, the trap door opens the moment I stop being honest about what I’m doing. Not honest in the sense of having perfect information, but honest in the sense of admitting, “I’m choosing this because I’m afraid,” or “I’m choosing this because it’s comfortable,” or “I’m choosing this because it benefits me, even if I’m dressing it up as something else.”

- Avoiding bad faith doesn’t mean I’ll always feel confident. It means I won’t pretend the choice wasn’t mine.

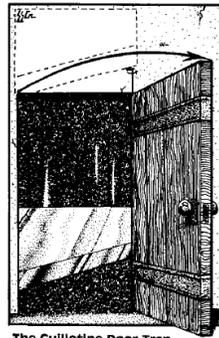
- There have been moments in my own life where I stood at a crossroads that felt exactly like this maze. A decision about work, about stability versus growth, about choosing comfort over long-term alignment with my values. In those moments, it was tempting to say, “This is just what I have to do.” But when I was honest, I knew that even choosing the safer path was still a choice I was making. The discomfort came not from uncertainty alone, but from realizing that I couldn’t outsource responsibility to circumstance. That awareness didn’t make the decision any easier, but it made it clearer.

- **Kant’s approach: freedom disciplined by moral law.**

- Sartre gives me responsibility. But Kant gives me a different kind of pressure: **principle**. For Kant, the question isn’t primarily “What do I feel like doing?” or even “What will work best?” It’s, “**Can I rationally will the rule behind my action as a universal law?**”

- In the tavern scenario, Kant’s presence is almost like a moral audit. If I’m about to justify something because it benefits me in the moment, Kant asks whether I would accept that reasoning if everyone used it. That’s a powerful test because it forces consistency.

- In my life, I do have personal ethical commitments — responsibility, respect, honesty, keeping my word. Kant pushes me to treat those commitments as real duties, not flexible preferences. He also reminds me that the “good life” can’t just be about outcomes. Sometimes doing the right thing costs me something, and the fact that it costs me doesn’t automatically make it wrong.

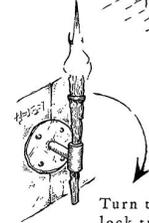
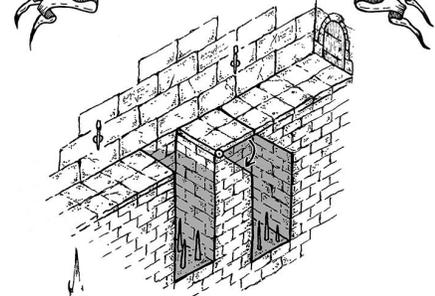


The Guillotine Door Trap

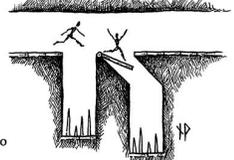


Poison Door

## A LEAP OF FAITH



Turn torch to lock trap mechanism



# Kant test: “Would I universalize this?”

## • Where Sartre and Kant collide

Before, I thought moral conflict was about choosing between “good” and “bad.” Sartre and Kant forced me to see that the deeper conflict is between authenticity and convenience, between principle and comfort. Sartre says I’m free and responsible even when nothing is guaranteed.

Kant says my freedom has to be guided by rational moral law, not impulse.

Sartre grounds responsibility in radical freedom; Kant grounds responsibility in rational consistency. I find myself needing both, freedom without principle feels unstable, but principle without freedom feels mechanical. If freedom alone creates value, then morality risks becoming preference. If law alone governs action, then authenticity risks disappearing.

Sartre claims that no moral law exists prior to human choice. Values are created through action. If that is true, then Kant’s moral law cannot have authority before I choose to adopt it.

Kant, however, insists that moral law binds rational beings universally and necessarily. If that is true, then Sartre’s idea of unconstrained freedom seems overstated. Freedom would not be the invention of value, but submission to rational duty.

“Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself.” (Sartre, 1946/1989, p. 22)

“I ought never to act in such a way that I couldn’t also will that my maxim should be a universal law.” (Kant, 1785/2006, p. 11) For Kant, this isn’t advice; it’s binding on all rational beings.

So which comes first: freedom or law? Creation or obligation?

If Kant is right, then freedom is not the power to create value but the capacity to recognize and submit to rational moral law. In that case, Sartre’s radical freedom becomes morally dangerous, because a person could “create” values that reason would reject. But if Sartre is right, and values only exist after we choose them, then Kant’s moral law has no authority until I freely adopt it. That would make duty secondary to freedom rather than foundational. The tension is real: either law disciplines freedom, or freedom legitimizes law.

What happens in the maze when I face a crossroads and one path looks easier but requires me to compromise something I claim to believe?

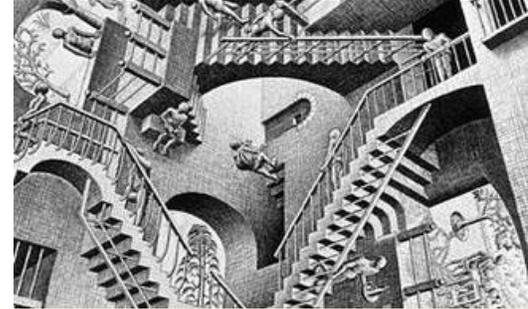
For Kant, moral worth doesn’t come from the outcome of the action, but from the intention to act out of duty in accordance with a law that reason itself would endorse universally, even when doing so is inconvenient.

This is where I think the “stairs” in the maze metaphor matter. The stairs represent gaining perspective, not by escaping responsibility, but by stepping back and seeing my choices more clearly.

For me, the “stairs” look like a moment of honest self-questioning:

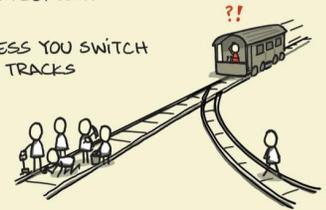
- **What am I trying to protect right now — my values, or my comfort? (Sartre)**
- **What rule am I acting on — and would I accept it if everyone did it? (Kant)**
- **Who gets affected by this choice besides me? (Mill)**

That combination is my practical “exit strategy.” It doesn’t eliminate uncertainty. But it does reduce self-deception. Although choices are always ours to make, it is important to remember that when it comes to values and morality, those choices reflect not only on ourselves but also on others.



YOU ARE THE DRIVER OF A  
RUNAWAY TROLLEY ABOUT TO  
KILL 5 PEOPLE...

... UNLESS YOU SWITCH  
THE TRACKS

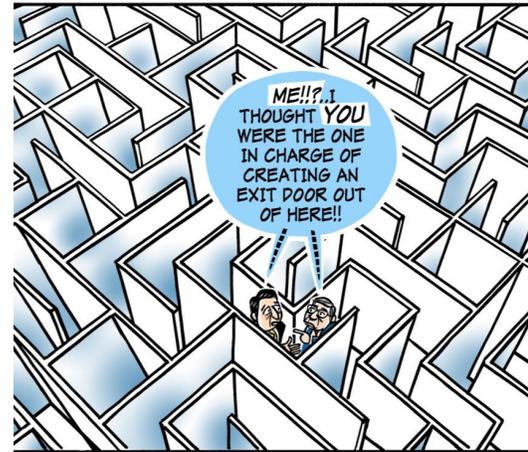
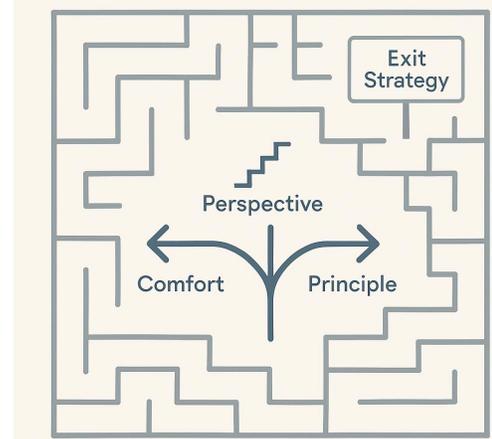


# My “Exit Strategy”

- **My position: living well is choosing honestly, choosing consistently, taking accountability and owning the outcome.**
- If I had to state my own view after sitting with these scenarios, it would be this:
- A good life isn't a life where I always pick the perfect option. It's a life where I **choose without bad faith, act on reasons I can stand behind, and accept responsibility for the human meaning my choices create.**
- “To have a duty is to be required to act out of respect for law.”(Kant, 1785/2005, p. 10)

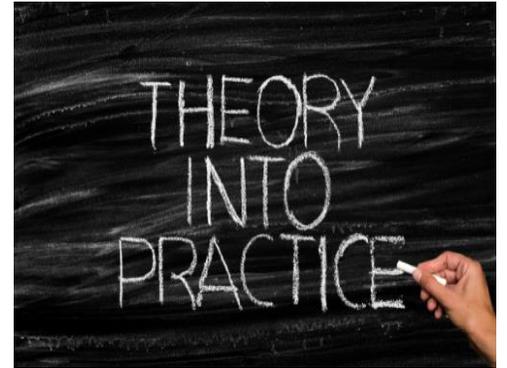
That means:

- **I don't get to hide behind my circumstances as if they erase agency (Sartre).**
- **I don't get to rewrite my principles whenever they become inconvenient (Kant).**
- **And I don't get to ignore consequences just because my intentions feel pure (Mill).**
- Mill would argue that even a perfectly universalizable maxim can still produce harm, and morality must ultimately account for the happiness or suffering our choices create.
- The tavern setting becomes symbolic here. Ethics isn't something that only happens in quiet rooms or textbooks. It happens in messy, social, real-time life; when you're tired, stressed, responsible for others, tempted to cut corners, or pressured to choose fast.
- The examined life isn't about being dramatic or “philosophical” in public. It's about being willing to pause at the crossroads and admit what's really going on: what I value, what I fear, and what I owe to others. Self-reflection is one of the most valuable tools we possess as humans, because it allows us not just to choose, but to choose consciously, and in doing so, to shape who we become.



# Why This Matters Now

In a world where external structures—institutions, traditions, even shared moral narratives, feel unstable or contested, the temptation to drift is strong. It's easier to react than to reflect. But the maze metaphor reminds me that responsibility does not disappear when clarity does. If anything, it becomes more urgent. Freedom without reflection becomes chaos; reflection without action becomes paralysis. Living well requires the courage to act and the discipline to examine why we act. As Sartre would say, we are still condemned to choose, even when we wish the maze would choose for us.



# Multimedia Elements as Philosophical Tools

- The first slide graphic represents the maze as internal rather than external.
- The second slide graphics represent the many routes we can take during life experiences.
- The third slide graphics represent that most times the trap doors, and bad faith decisions can lead to unwanted consequences.
- The fourth slide graphics represent the many perspectives of life and even those that are sometimes unseen, in moral situations, it makes us think differently.
- The fifth slide graphics represent the three-compass questions, and that creating an exit in the maze is our own responsibility and a choice in itself.



## Closing Reflection

If the maze teaches anything, it's that I don't become free by finding a path with no risk. I become free by accepting that risk and still choosing with integrity. The real win isn't just "getting out." The real win is exiting without having to lie to myself about how I got there, owning every decision, action, and consequence along the way.



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