

Human Freedom: Existential Philosophy in Video Games

Anthony J. Eisner

(Advisor: Dr Bernard Wills)

Introduction

What is Humanities? This question is best answered as the study of how people process and document the human experience. This incorporates many fields such as; Philosophy, Literature, Religion, Art, Music, History, and many more which fall under the umbrella of the Humanities.¹ Video games are an art form that incorporate the above listed modes of expression. Like the diverse field of the Humanities, there are many genres of games which serve different functions depending on their medium. Pong, for example, is nothing more than two-dimensional tennis, and has the sole purpose of entertaining the player; besides affecting the player's personal experience, Pong does not include any of the previously mentioned topics. However, a genre known as Role Playing Games (RPGs) does incorporate everything from the Humanities. The best way to describe a RPG is to imagine experiencing the entirety of Homer's *Iliad* with the music, the sights and the sounds, and the expressions of others, over a period of forty hours or more with added music. Think about watching the film *Troy* (directed by Wolfgang Petersen) but rather than following Brad Pitt as Achilles, you take control of Achilles and experience the Epic in your own way that no other person can replicate. That is the appeal of an RPG.

As an avid player of RPGs I have noticed a trope that appears in almost every RPG: the quest for human freedom. The general plot of most games can be summarized as: "humanity is oppressed by something and it is up to you the hero to free them." This trope has always intrigued me. I always wondered why the protagonists fought so strongly against the villains, as they are not always definitively shown as evil. This is very common in the sub genre of Japanese RPGs called JRPG. JRPGs tend to showcase many mature themes and ideas in their games and gives the player a lot to think about. As I progressed in my undergraduate studies in the Humanities, I noticed some of the ideas I was studying was already introduced to me in video games. Remembering Nietzsche and his idea that myths and stories are a good way to learn values, I began to look more closely and examine the

games I was playing. However, video games tend to be brushed aside and thought to be lacking in intellectual ideas, as they are a new form of art. Thus, for this essay I will discuss the ideas that are, indeed, found in video games. I will specifically focus on the existential idea of human freedom, as this idea is a commonly found trope within RPGs. I will be exploring the ideas of Dostoevsky in *Final Fantasy X* (FFX), Nietzsche in *Xenoblade Chronicles* (*Xenoblade*), and Sartre in both. For the purposes of understanding, please note two things: 1) many of each philosopher's ideas can be found in both games, but due to the length of this essay it is best to discuss only one per game (apart from Sartre), and 2) this essay is being written for both those who have knowledge of these philosophers, but not the video games, and those people who have knowledge of these video games, but not the philosophers. This is intended to incite both groups into considering the unfamiliar works and to learn from them. Thus, I will first give a summary of each video game's plot, followed by a summary of each philosopher's ideas on freedom to help familiarize the reader, and finally discuss how they are illustrated in the video game. These two summaries are very condensed and are simply to introduce the entire plot of the game so a reader unfamiliar to these games can get a sense of what transpired. When I get to specific ideas shown in the plot that illustrate the Philosopher's ideas I will explain in further detail.

A Quick Introduction to the Video Games

FFX is set in the world of Spira where the people live in fear of the gargantuan monster Sin who attacks settlements. The religion Yevon, which most of the people of Spira follow, states that the monster is a manifestation of humanity's sins of war and for becoming dependent on technology. As the peoples of Spira build their civilization around Sin, they cling to the one hope they have. This hope is found in the Summoners of Yevon. Yevon teaches that once humanity has atoned for its sins, the monster will disappear. The Summoners are tasked to travel to the Temples of Fayth² and learn to summon the Final

¹ "What Are the Humanities?"

² The Fayth are a collective of Aeons who are people who sacrificed themselves that fight for a Summoner.

Aeon and defeat Sin to bring the calm;³ Sin eventually returns, but it is the hope that Sin will stay dead because humanity has finally atoned that keep the people of Spira from falling to despair.

The player takes the role of Tidus, a young man who is a star athlete from Zanarkand. During an attack from Sin, he believes he is transported 1000 years into the future and meets the young Summoner Yuna. He joins Yuna on her Pilgrimage to defeat Sin and is tasked with saving Spira from its grim reality. During the pilgrimage, it is revealed that Sin is the spirit of the supposed creator of Yevon, Yu Yevon,⁴ and he possesses the Final Aeons of Summoners,⁵ and his religion uses the fear of Sin and the hope of his defeat to control the populace through what is called "the cycle."⁶ Followers of Yevon are unable to think freely without the religion of Yevon and it is up to Tidus to teach them of free will to free them of Yevon and defeat Sin for good.⁷

Xenoblade Chronicles takes place in a world where all life lives on two giant Titans who are each controlled by a God. They battled each other until they fell into a deep slumber, and life emerged from their bodies. Biological life emerged from the Bionis and machine life from the Mechonis. Both lifeforms continued the war of their respective Titans, with the machine life (Mechons) having the upper hand; this war ended with the Mechons using biological life as a food and energy source, which has driven the Homs (humans) to the brink of extinction.

The player takes the role of Shulk a young Homs Scientist who studies the Monado, the only weapon that can harm the Mechons. However, the Monado will cripple those who wield it, such as the last user who has been bed ridden for two years. During a Mechon raid Shulk is chosen by the Monado suffering none of the ill effects of the Monado. However, Shulk is a weak fighter and his Childhood friend Fiora is killed protecting him. He and his friend Reyn set out to take revenge on the Mechons. Along the way they are joined by other Homs and members of the other sentient races such as Nopon and High Entia. Along this journey it is discovered that Fiora is alive as a half Mechon and is Host to the Mechons God Meyneth. Here they learn that the Mechons were using biological life as an energy

source to steal energy from the Bionis' God Zanza so he could not reawaken and complete his plan to create the world anew. During a confrontation Shulk is killed, and it is revealed that he was created by Zanza as a vessel to reawaken. Realizing that he did not exist, the consciousness of Shulk Wills himself into existence so he can stop Zanza and create a future free from the fate of Zanza. Ultimately, he creates a world where all life can decide on its own future.⁸

Dostoevsky and Final Fantasy X

Dostoevsky's idea of "The Grand Inquisitor" in *The Brothers Karamazov* is presented through the main protagonists. In "The Grand Inquisitor," Jesus has made his second coming and is captured by the Grand Inquisitor where he tells Jesus of human freedom and happiness from his perspective. The Grand Inquisitor believes that Happiness and freedom are two incompatible ideas and if humans could to choose they will always choose happiness. However, he believes humans do not have the capacity to even choose but rather are drawn to happiness over freedom. The Grand Inquisitor uses the metaphor of the breads, one earthly, representing happiness, the other heavenly, representing freedom, in the discussion of Jesus' three temptations. In the first temptation, The Grand Inquisitor tells Jesus that he should have taken the earthly bread as humans will always seek bread given to them. Because humans are weak they are not able to follow Jesus' example and obtain heavenly bread, and instead will accept earthly bread. The Grand Inquisitor critiques Jesus saying that he should give the bread to the weak because they are unable to comprehend the gift of freedom. Subconsciously humans say "enslave us, but feed us,"⁹ and the church provides the weak earthly bread under the lie that it is heavenly bread from Jesus. In the second temptation, Jesus did not test God to perform a miracle. Again, the Inquisitor tells Jesus that he should have taken the temptation because humans want to worship something in common. Humans worship miracles, thus, Jesus could have performed a miracle for all of humanity to worship (i.e. a display of power to worship). But because Jesus wanted humanity to freely choose to worship he resisted the temptation. The Grand Inquisitor states that without having something in common to worship man will destroy each other in attempts to impose

³ For a period of time Sin is dead.

⁴ Created by his daughter Yunalesca as he turned into a mindless spirit before Yevon's creation.

⁵ Think demonic possession.

⁶ Sin returns, Summoner does a pilgrimage, defeats Sin and brings the calm, repeat.

⁷ *Final Fantasy X* Video Game.

⁸ *Xenoblade Chronicles* Video Game.

⁹ Dostoevsky, "The Grand Inquisitor," 306.

their beliefs on others.¹⁰ The last temptation Jesus is offered is the power to rule the entire world. The Inquisitor despises Jesus for refusing this temptation because if he chose to rule over humanity, he would have created happiness for everyone. But this again would have robbed humanity of its freedom of choice. However, the Inquisitor took the temptation and will rule the world in his stead and will bring earthly bread to all the weak and only the few who rule will be given the burden of choice, the knowledge of good and evil. The Inquisitor states that he has corrected the work of Jesus and has created happiness through the obedience of the masses. The strong suffer in service to the weak unlike Jesus who seems to hate the weak by giving them the suffering of freedom. During this whole discussion Jesus only gives one answer to the Inquisitor in the form of a kiss. This kiss symbolizes the one thing the Inquisitor cannot conceive. That is love. Love can only be understood through the choices made from the knowledge of good and evil.¹¹ In this text though the story is told through the viewpoint of the Grand Inquisitor Dostoevsky agrees with the freedom of Jesus which is further developed in *Notes from the Underground*.

Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground* displays a different view point on freedom. The Underground man is a person who suffers from hyper consciousness or conscious inertia. This is the idea that one is so intelligent that one is always pondering ideas and can never decide on the topic at hand. Because of this he is in constant flux and changes what he believes and what he wants to do, making him very spiteful. This spite is directed towards those that are less intelligent than him that can make decisions due to less consciousness. The Underground Man believes that all humans are free and strive to be free: this conflicts with Dostoevsky's Grand Inquisitor. The Underground Man states that all humans wish for the 'independent choice' and will always choose the one choice that is within their power of free will. The example he uses is the crystal palace, a perfect utopia. Once the crystal palace is finished the first thing a person will do is smash it. The reason for this is that we strive to make a choice that is our own. Thus, when we are left with a decision that is not ours to make, we will do something else. Even if this decision is the worst decision we can make we will make it because it is our choice. Like the Underground Man says "and how do these sages know that a man wants a

normal, a virtuous choice? What has made them conceive that a man must want a rationally advantageous choice? What a man wants is simply *Independent* choice, whatever that independence may cost and wherever it may lead."¹² However, because he constantly ponders his options for the best choice, he is never able to decide and ends up suffering in indecision and does nothing. He believes that it would be better for him to be lazy as there would be a reason for his indecision, i.e. a decision to make no decisions. Thus, it is best for a person to decide no matter if it is a good or an evil decision. The Underground Man, however, self loathing and envious of those that make decisions, does not want decisions made for him even though he is constantly pondering and suffering from it. He still has the option to decide and no amount of suffering would make him want to give that up. As he says, "if you stick to consciousness, even though the same result is attained, you can at least beat yourself at times, and that will, at any rate, liven you up. Reactionary as it is, corporal punishment is better than nothing."¹³

Like Dostoevsky, Final Fantasy X uses characters to personify the ideas the work is playing with. In this case the game has characters that illustrate traits and ideas of characters seen in *The Grand Inquisitor* and *Notes from the Underground*. It also places Dostoevsky's ideas on Human freedom in a different context that is both insightful and entertaining to the viewer. Yunalesca and Yevon who mirror with the Grand Inquisitor and the Church, Tidus and Yuna who mirror Jesus and the people, Tidus and the Underground Man, and Auron who mirrors The Underground Man.

To begin, I will discuss the religion Yevon, and the character Yunalesca who emulate the Church and The Grand Inquisitor. Like the Grand Inquisitor, Yunalesca believes that Humanity is weak and is unable to find happiness in freedom.¹⁴ Like the Grand Inquisitor, she believes that humanity will never obtain happiness in freedom because humanity will seek to destroy itself in its freedom. Yunalesca created Yevon as way to enslave the populace for the benefit of their happiness, like the Church of the Grand Inquisitor. Happiness for Yunalesca is best described as Hope, her earthly bread. Like the Grand Inquisitor says, "Human existence lies not in just staying alive, but in finding something to live for.

¹⁰ Ibid. 306.

¹¹ Ibid. 297-319.

¹² Dostoevsky, "Part 1: Underground," 20.

¹³ Ibid. 26.

¹⁴ This is due to her experience with a devastating war 1000 years ago.

Without a concrete idea of what he is living for, man would refuse to live, would rather exterminate himself than remain on this earth, even if bread were scattered all around him."¹⁵ In Yunalesca's time people lived free, but because of differing ideals two cities warred, nearly destroying Spira. Sin was a weapon created to end the war, but went rampant. Using Sin, Yunalesca told the frightened people of Spira that if they forgo technology and come together to atone for their wrong doings, Sin will one day disappear. Acting like the Grand Inquisitor, Yunalesca created the Final Summoning, the 'miracle' that brings about the calm and gives the people something in common to hope for and a reason to follow Yevon. With this hope the people of Spira followed Yevon like 'happy babes' in their hope that one day a Summoner would defeat Sin for good, this is the bread Yunalesca gives. Like the Grand Inquisitor gives happiness under the lie of salvation from Jesus, Yunalesca gives hope under the lie that Sin will one day disappear. However, "the cycle" ensures that Sin never disappears and the people will always live in fear of him and will always need the hope of Yunalesca. It is her belief that "It is better for you to die in hope than to live in despair."¹⁶ This comes from her view of the world before Yevon where Spira was nothing but violence and war, and believed that humanity would never truly be at peace. Thus, with Sin she gave Spira a common enemy and united everyone under the hope of peace. But by making this peace unobtainable, the people will be forever enslaved by the hope of peace. This has allowed Yevon to rise as rulers over much of Spira paralleling the Christianity of the Grand Inquisitor after the acceptance of the third temptation. By forcing their ideas on humanity and ruling them they have created a false peace under a totalitarian state in order for humanity to be 'happy.' Yunalesca believes this is the best for humanity to be enslaved under her 'hope'¹⁷ but the Protagonist Tidus, like Jesus thinks otherwise.

Tidus resembles Jesus in "The Grand Inquisitor." He serves as an example to the Summoner Yuna that one can make one's own decisions, like Jesus did in his rejection of the three temptations. Like Jesus, Tidus wants the people of Spira to make up their own minds and not strictly follow a belief because they must.

¹⁵ Dostoevsky, "The Grand Inquisitor," 306.

¹⁶ Final Fantasy X, "Meeting Yunalesca."

¹⁷ Yunalesca's hope is referred to false hope by the Protagonist but it sounds weird calling it such from Yunalesca's perspective.

'Coming from the past' he understands freedom and is deeply confused that the people of Spira blindly follow the teachings of Yevon. The best example of this is when Maester Seymour proposes to Yuna. She and most of the party were thinking about the masses and whether the marriage will make the masses happy or not. Tidus wondered why none of the Party asked Yuna "Do you love Seymour? Do you even like him?"¹⁸ Little questions like this eventually awaken Yuna to the idea that she can choose her own path in life rather than following the path Yevon has paved for her. When meeting Yunalesca, Tidus provides the best example of free will for Yuna to learn from. Once Yuna is presented with Yunalesca's hope, Tidus instantly denies this as a right way to defeat Sin and proposes they make their own decision to find 'another way.'¹⁹ This provides the first real decision Yuna has ever been offered and has the power to make. Yuna states to Yunalesca "I will live with my sorrow, I will live my own life! I will defeat sorrow, in his place. I will stand my ground and be strong. I don't know when it will be but someday, I will conquer it, and I will do it without false hope."²⁰ In rejecting the false hope of Yunalesca she comes to make the first step towards becoming truly free.

Coming back to Tidus, he also serves as an example for those who are struggling with their freedom when they are at a loss. Tidus throughout the game is always at a loss, he was thrown 1000 years into the future, and eventually learns that he does not even exist. He is a character that is always faced with the unknown but always strives to make the best choice he can. He is initially a childish, selfish, and self-centered individual making decisions that revolve only around himself. Very often he says "This is my story" whenever he makes an important decision. However, over the course of the game he sheds these traits and begins to see a bigger picture, becoming more mature, and makes decisions that involve him and others changing his quote to "This is our story." He never loses the ability to choose and strive for an option he sees as right or good. As said above he instantly rejects Yunalesca's hope and decides he will find another way. He states "you're right, I might not even have a chance. But no way am I gonna just stand here and let Yuna go. This is my story. It will go

¹⁸ Final Fantasy X, "Seymour's Proposal."

¹⁹ Tidus at this point does not have a plan to end 'the cycle' but will reject it due to moral reasons.

²⁰ Final Fantasy X, "Before Yunalesca Fight."

the way I want it. Or ill end it here."²¹ This shows Yuna that even though the situation is hopeless we must strive for the best option even if it is hopeless. This is what the Underground Man says in *Notes from the Underground*. It is not the best option that humanity always strives for but independent choice.²² Tidus makes the choice that he himself made, although he knows it is a choice that will most likely end badly, it is his to make.

In "The Grand Inquisitor," Jesus gave only one answer to the Grand Inquisitor and that is the answer of Love. Jesus is told that Humanity is weak and cannot become free and happy and must choose between the two. However, it is the answer of love that revokes this, as love is what will bring humanity to make the good choice. Tidus is an example of this, even though he is childish, selfish, and self-centered in the beginning. It is love that allows Tidus to make the best decision in his hopelessness. His love for Yuna, and his love for his friends will not allow him to accept fate as the only option that Yunalesca provides. Rather he searches for a better way to save the people he loves. It is also through love that Tidus sacrifices himself to create a free world for his friends. Knowing that defeating Sin/Yu Yevon will destroy the power that allows him to exist, he still strives for the best option he creates and decides upon. This is another similarity he has with Jesus as he sacrificed himself for the betterment of those that he loves. Through love, humanity will reject the temptations of the Grand Inquisitor.²³

Another character, Auron, connects to Dostoevsky's Underground Man. Like the Underground Man, Auron suffers from conscious inertia. Auron was the guardian to Yuna's father Braska and was faced with Yunalesca's hope. However, he was torn between following Braska and Jecht, who decided to believe in Yunalesca's Hope, or convincing them to find another way. Because Auron was unable to decide what to do, the decision was made for him. Like the Underground Man he loathes himself for his indecisiveness and that his friends could decide. In his self hate he confronts Yunalesca wondering what the sense is in false hope as it amounts to nothing, losing himself to emotion. This results in his death, but his hatred for himself brings his spirit back to Spira as an Unsent²⁴ until he can finally make a decision and complete it. Auron,

knowing the suffering and pointlessness of Conscious inertia, pressures the party on many occasions to make a choice and not ponder on the idea. When facing Yunalesca most of the party is unsure whether to follow Tidus and Yuna or accept her truth Auron speaks up. "Now! This is it! Now is the time to choose! Die and be free of pain or live and fight your sorrow! Now is the time to shape your stories! Your fate is in your hands!"²⁵ This is his pressure to force the party to decide, as he knows the suffering indecisiveness causes. In this way, Auron is different from the Underground Man because the Underground Man does not want to rid himself of his Conscious Inertia. Rather he enjoys it. Because of his indecisiveness he is on a higher level of freedom and has more options open to him. However, he still believes that making a decision is better than doing nothing thus his envy of those that can make a decision.

Nietzsche and Xenoblade Chronicles

Nietzsche does not directly talk about the freedom of humanity like Dostoevsky but references a "free spirit." This free spirit is the Übermensch (Overman) which is a person who faces his or her difficulties and is not a part of what he calls the herd. Nietzsche mentions two kinds of morality: the herd or slave morality of Good and Evil and the Master morality of Good and Bad. The slave morality is the Judaeo-Christian idea of morality and believes that there is only one right way to live and what is not right is evil and despised. Nietzsche believes that this morality cultivates victims and the weak who are not able to become his Übermensch. With master morality, it is whatever is life affirming to the Übermensch that is moral and right. Life affirming in the sense that anything that allowed the individual to feel powerful and human is good. Nietzsche explains this through the Classical Greek idea of morality. In Greek culture, there were many Gods that held different values and upheld different norms. For example, if someone valued the art of music as the best way to live, then they would follow the God Apollo as the ideal for their norm. If the person valued glory and honor as the ideal, then they would follow the God Ares. With countless Gods in Polytheism a person can live their life as a Free Spirit as many Gods displayed many different norms as Good and moral. What is considered bad is anything that limited these life affirming actions of the individual, for example Christianity. Christianity

²¹ Final Fantasy X, "Meeting Yunalesca."

²² Dostoevsky, "Part 1: Underground," 20.

²³ Dostoevsky, "The Grand Inquisitor," 316-318.

²⁴ An angry spirit that has not progressed on to the afterlife.

²⁵ Final Fantasy X, "Before Yunalesca Fight."

limits the free spirit in the sense that some life affirming actions are considered evil. For example, if you wanted to cheat on your lover the slave morality would class this as an evil act. However, in the master morality it would be bad not to cheat if it is what you desired. He is not saying directly to be unfaithful to your lover, rather be faithful to yourself. If this is what you desire then do it.²⁶ To become an Übermensch one must overcome the slave morality of Good and Evil.

In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche speaks of the metaphor of the three Metamorphoses that the free spirit goes through to break out of the slave morality. First the spirit must become a camel. The camel is a beast of burden, and carries what is heavy; this heaviness is the burden of truth-seeking and the camel journeys off into the desert. In the desert the camel finds the truth of the slave morality that is from the great dragon. The dragon is God and tells the camel "thou shalt" which means thou shalt follow slave morality. The camel is only able to discover the truth of slave morality and is unable to rebel against it. Thus, the camel must transform into the lion. The lion responds with "I will" meaning I will not follow your thou shalt. The lion rejects the slave morality of the dragon, a sacred "No." This lion wants to live in its own values and not the values of the dragon. The lion only has the ability to defy the dragon and cannot create its own values and must transform into the child. The reason the Lion cannot create is because it lacks the innocence to see things through new eyes as the lion only knows of slave morality. The child unlike the camel and lion does not live in the reality of the dragon but wakes into its own world, a world it has created. This world is completely new and is a new beginning and is a sacred "Yes." From innocent eyes the child plays with the new reality as a creator of its own values; "the man who has been lost in the world now conquers his own world."²⁷ Thus, the free spirit has now rejected the values of the slave morality and has now entered the master morality, the values they desire. The spirit now wills its own will becoming the Free Spirit, becoming the Übermensch.²⁸

Returning to the lion for a moment, the act of defeating the dragon represents one of Nietzsche's most famous ideas: the death of God, Himself. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche describes a madman running into a marketplace, and proclaiming to the crowd: "where has God gone?...I will tell you!

We have killed him. You and I! All of us are his murderers!...the holiest and mightiest the world has ever known has bled to death against our knives."²⁹ The crowd laughs at this man, as they are atheists and do not understand him; to the people, God does not exist. Here, Nietzsche illustrates that we, as humans, hold an ability to create. The death of God is not the realization of living in a Godless world, but, rather, it is a call to become a free spirit; instead of viewing life as a fixed fate, humanity should view it as something that we create.³⁰ By understanding that the bloody knife used to kill God is in our own hands—that we are the one who have killed God—we gain the power to create our own future, and thus become the Übermensch. However, not everyone will be able to see the bloody knife and become an Übermensch, and Nietzsche describes two kinds of people who will not be able to understand the great importance of killing God. The first is the Last Man who does not feel the need to go beyond the death of God, and believes that the world can now be fully understood now that God is dead.³¹ The Last Man replaces the truth of God with Science, and nothing changes for this person. The Last man is a lion that cannot transform into the child. The second is the Nihilist: someone who understands that God is dead, but does not see themselves as the murderer of God. The Nihilist sees meaninglessness in a world without God, and thus cannot see themselves as a creator; the Nihilist sees the death of God as a sunset, rather than the sunrise that the Übermensch sees.³² The Nihilist is a camel that cannot transform into a Lion.

Before I begin discussing Nietzschean ideas that are found in *Xenoblade*, I must explain the *Monado* which is very important to the philosophy of this game and is very complex. The *Monado* is the combination of two words: *moneo* (Latin for "warn") and *monad* (Greek for "unit"). The first word relates to the visions given to Shulk by the *Monado* throughout the game, which warn him of deaths and other events. The second word relates to the Pythagorean concept of a monad: a unit thought to be the first thing to come into existence. This can be interpreted as the first divinity, or the totality of all beings by the Gnostics. Since the *Monado*'s most striking feature is a circle that makes up the handguard,

²⁹ Ibid. 71-72.

³⁰ Note that Nietzsche was deeply troubled by the death of God as he believed that humanity was not prepared to deal with his death.

³¹ Fritzsche, 12.

³² Ibid.

²⁶ Fritzsche, 20.

²⁷ Nietzsche, 98.

²⁸ Ibid. 96-98. See Fritzsche, 29-34.

and the Pythagoreans believed that the geometric shape of the Monad was a circle, this idea is plausible. In *Xenoblade Chronicles*, the Monado is a tool that a god can use to control and create their world, and is also a physical manifestation of their will. By using it, a god can alter and change the fate of the world, and all the beings they create must follow it. In addition, the Monado is not only a tool, but is like the Gnostic idea of the Monad and is a being beyond gods, represented by the character Alvis in the game.³³

Once the introduction of *Xenoblade Chronicles* ends, and Shulk embarks on his quest, he becomes the camel and bares the weight of truth seeking, as well as the suffering caused by his inability to protect others. During his time as the camel he discovers many secrets of the Monado and the universe and becomes continuously stronger until he unlocks the secrets of reality. At the top of the Mechonis, he discovers that Zanza has reawakened and will destroy the world to create it anew. Here, Zanza is the grand dragon (God) and he tells Shulk that the future Shulk believed he was changing was Zanza's will; although Shulk changed outcomes, the framework of the fate Zanza created is unchanged. Zanza states that all life on his body (the Bionis) is nothing but the energy-source needed for him to reawaken, and that this is the sole purpose of the life he created. The level of control exerted over his creations is Zanza's way of saying "thou shalt [obey my commands]," just like the dragon. In addition, Zanza appears as a shimmering figure and he is clothed in gold, which resembles the appearance of the dragon in Zarathustra. Shulk has an out of body experience as he talks to Alvis. He tells Shulk that the lives created by the gods of this world inevitably attempt to escape the passage of the fate the god's will, and this signifies the beginning of their destruction. Alvis tells Shulk: "So decide, Shulk. Will you walk the path laid out by Zanza? Or will you walk a new path? The Monado awaits you."³⁴ Shulk responds with: "If I'd wanted to walk the predetermined path, I wouldn't have come this far. Even with the odds stacked against us, even though I can't see the future, I'll keep walking. My own path. That I decide."³⁵ Here, it is clear that Shulk has transformed into the lion, and he faces Zanza with his "I will," which manifests as a new Monado (will) of Humanity.

In *Zarathustra*, the Lion necessarily does not

need to kill the dragon, but just needs to steal its freedom back to escape the slave morality. The reason the Lion does not need to kill the dragon is that not all people can become Übermensch's, and will need slave morality. As said in a footnote above, Nietzsche believes that the death of is not a good thing as not all people are ready to deal with that idea and need slave morality. This is seen with the madman when he says "What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Where is it going now? Where are we going? Away from all suns? Aren't we ceaselessly falling? Backward, sideways, forward, in all directions? Is there an up or a down at all? Aren't we just roaming through an infinite nothing?"³⁶ The Madman is deeply disturbed in the death of God, as the slave morality is the bases of our culture and understanding of the world. Without Him everything is unknown and people like the Last Man and Nihilist are unprepared for this, thus the need for slave morality. However, *Xenoblade's* conclusion believes that everyone is not just prepared for the death of God but wills God's death. For Shulk this is for a better future and he wills Zanza's death, which manifests the Monado of Humanity and becomes the Knife that kills God. Shulk is the sole Lion of the world but he believes that everyone is prepared and able to become the Child with him. This is illustrated when Alvis declares him the new God as he had manifested his will into a Monado. Rather than becoming a God, Shulk wishes for a new world to be created so all of humanity can become Übermensch: "I won't decide. The future should be decided by each and every person in the world. And so, what I...No, what we wish for is...A world with no Gods!"³⁷ With this, a new world is created and everyone becomes the child in the newly created world. This an optimistic view of Nietzsche's work as said before he believes that only the few can become the child and enter master morality. However, Shulk created a world where only masters exist presenting an optimistic interpretation of Nietzsche's idea of the Übermensch.

Sartre and Final Fantasy X and Xenoblade Chronicles

In *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Sartre discusses the idea of existence before essence which is in opposition to the more familiar idea of essence before existence. Essence before existence is the idea that Humans have a meaning

³³ The Monado is not only the manifestation of ones will but also the god of will itself.

³⁴ *Xenoblade Chronicles*, "I walk my own path."

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Nietzsche, 72.

³⁷ *Xenoblade Chronicles*, "The End of the World."

before they come into creation. For example, a God creates Humans with a set purpose in mind like a person makes a chair with the purpose to be sat on. Sartre's existence before essence is in counter to this and states that humans come into existence then create their essence. The essence of a person is varied to each individual as one's essence is shaped through one's actions. As an example, heroes are heroes because of their heroic actions not because they were born a hero. As well cowards are cowards because of their cowardly actions not because they were born that way. Sartre does state that one is not confined to a single essence because of their actions, as a person's essence is constantly shaping through their actions. Cowards can become a heroes if their actions become more heroic and less cowardly and vice versa for the hero.³⁸ In this idea there is also a strong sense of personal responsibility. Sartre states that when one acts upon an action one is deciding the moral obligations of all of humanity. By this he means that we should gauge our actions with the thought of "What would happen if everyone did so?" referring back to the lover example in Nietzsche, "if I cheat on my lover, I am creating my essence as a cheater," as well as the idea that everyone should cheat. However, persons will only choose on what they believe is moral; thus, if people believe that cheating is immoral then they will not cheat and vice versa. As Sartre said "in Fashioning myself I fashion man."³⁹

Sartre states that we are in a state of anguish. This state is caused by the responsibility of our decisions in shaping what humanity should be. The task for choosing what humanity should be is daunting for humanity, because the individual does not believe that they are worthy of the task. Therefore, we lean on the idea of God to impose a morality upon ourselves and reject this responsibility. Referring back to Dostoevsky in *The Brothers Karamazov*, he states "If God did not exist, everything would be permitted."⁴⁰ This could in fact allow much of what we deem immoral today as moral. For example, high ranking Nazi's see the killing of the Jewish peoples as moral.⁴¹ Without a God, it is up to every individual to create themselves as what they believe to be the best way to live their lives as an example to all of humanity. By always asking the

question "What would happen if everyone did so?"⁴² we can gauge what we see as moral and lead by example for everyone else in hopes everyone will find common moral actions. As Sartre stated "Man is nothing else but what he purposes, he exists only in so far as he realizes himself, he is therefore nothing else but the sum of his actions, nothing else but what his life is."⁴³ But because we are condemned some may turn to Quietism. This is when the individuals cannot deal with the anguish and blame circumstances or others for their short comings. Sartre simply states that these short comings involve people creating themselves in this fashion. As said above, it is our actions that create us and though they are not our ideas they still make us. However, individuals can escape their short comings through effort as we can change our essence. This is the optimism of Sartre's philosophy as we are only limited by ourselves.⁴⁴ Both Protagonists display the idea of existence before essence in what could be called their "catch phrases." Tidus' "this is my story" and Shulk's "the future is ours" are symbols of their wills. When either of them state their catch phrase it is directly after an assertion of their will: Tidus rejecting Yuna's "cycle" and Shulk after he changes a future the Monado showed him. These catch phrases are verbal expressions of their internal opposition to a predetermined fate, their rejection of essence before existence. Like displaying heroic action makes one heroic, it is this verbal action that makes them creators of their own self. In addition, both of these characters learn that they do not exist at some point. Tidus being a resident of dream Zanarkand has no meaning and created his own purpose upon entering Spira. He created his own purpose to free the ones he loved from the enslavement of Yevon and the fear of Sin. Although he does fade out of existence in the end, Tidus was able to overcome anguish and create his own essence. Shulk however, did not come into the world as a blank slate as Tidus did, as Shulk's purpose was to be a vessel for Zanza while he rested. However, when killed to awaken Zanza, Shulk served his purpose and no longer had a meaning. With no purpose Shulk created his own purpose, he created a world where everyone can have the power to create their

³⁸ Sartre, 6.

³⁹ Ibid. 3.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 4.

⁴¹ Please excuse the one-sided analogy but it is best to go with the extreme to the Christian morality in this example.

⁴² Sartre, 3.

⁴³ Ibid. 5.

⁴⁴ Note: the constraint of the human condition (people with shaky hands may never become surgeons because of their constraint of having shaky hands.)

own purposes. Both Tidus and Shulk are the 'first' in their respective world to think like this bringing the idea of existence before essence to their respective worlds.

Both Final Fantasy X and Xenoblade Chronicles games illustrate Sartre's optimistic tone in their ending scenes. Both games took place in a world where freedom was taken from humanity. Humanity was given its purpose, following the essence before the existence. In FFX Yevon kept humanity enslaved and gave a purpose for everyone to follow. In Xenoblade the purpose for humanity was to return to God as energy so that he might awaken. However, in both games the protagonists fight this idea of a predetermined destiny and create a world where they decide their own purposes. At the ending of these games is the first instance of existence before essence in their history. They, like the existential philosophy, bring forth to humanity the idea that we create our own meaning and future. The games follow Sartre in his optimism in the ending speeches of Yuna and Shulk. When addressing the people of the world in a speech Yuna says "now Sin is finally dead. Now Spira is ours again. Now we can make new homes for ourselves, and new dreams. The road is ahead of us. So let's start out today."⁴⁵ Yuna is saying that we now have the freedom to create what we want to be. Now the idea of existence before essence is reality and it is time for us to create ourselves. I have already talked about this in Xenoblade as Shulk wonders about all the possibilities of humanity and wants to be able to meet everyone.⁴⁶ Both games in the end did condemn humanity to be free but it is for the betterment of humanity.

Conclusion

For this paper, I have just simply skimmed the surface of both these philosophers and their ideas presented in these video games. It is my hope that I have successfully shown how video games are a great art form that portray the humanities. These games are more than just entertainment and teach us values to live by. By using the ideas of philosophers such as Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, and Sartre, Final Fantasy X and Xenoblade Chronicles have taught people the value of freedom. It is my hope that this paper may incite others to incorporate video games into the umbrella of the humanities.

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⁴⁵ Final Fantasy X, "Yuna's Closing Speech."

⁴⁶ Xenoblade Chronicles, "Ending."