

# Awareness of Freedom and Responsibility behind Evelyn's Existential Despair in *Everything Everywhere All at Once* Movie Script

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## ABSTRACT

*This article examines how existential awareness develops in Evelyn Wang as the main character in Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert's movie, Everything Everywhere All at Once (2022). Evelyn is forced to face the fact that her life could have gone in a million different directions that were all influenced by her ability to make different decisions as she gets caught up in the enormous complexity of the multiverse. Disorientation quickly gives way to a more profound understanding: the freedom to live any life comes with the unavoidable obligation to deal with the fallout from every choice you make or steer clear of. Based on Søren Kierkegaard's idea of existential despair and qualitative method, this study investigates how Evelyn's journey highlights the psychological burden that comes with realizing one's own freedom. Instead of providing a feeling of freedom, the limitless options make her more conscious of the limitless repercussions. When viewed in this light, the movie turns into a meditation on the difficulty of being authentic in the face of limitless possibilities. In conclusion, Evelyn's development hinges on her ability to accept responsibility for her decisions in a chaotic and uncertain world as well as her ability to make choices.*

## 1. Introduction

The way that literary works reflect the real world is not a recent discovery, and movies are one type of literature that does this. According to Kierkegaard, existential despair occurs throughout people's lives, particularly when they are questioning why they are here (Farr, 2021; Shanti and Gonsalves, 2021). Their protracted quest for meaning in life will cause them great discomfort, worry, and distress (Taghizadeh, 2023; Roy & bin Che, 2023).

Human beings are constantly creating the person that they want to become. However, it is not always easy because human beings, as a paradoxical synthesis, are infinite and finite. These things greatly affect a person when they are conscious of their freedom. Finite in the sense that human potential is limited or that people are bound by a particular set of laws,

customs, religions, and other factors (Kierkegaard in Mulenga, 2021). One could argue that freedom is limitless in and of itself. It is important that these infinite and finite things are balanced and do not overwhelm one another (Kierkegaard, 1980; Pasopati et al., 2025).

Written by Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert, *Everything Everywhere All at Once* is an action-science fiction movie that won multiple awards for its creative narrative structure and in-depth thematic analysis. It was released on June 22, 2022. Through Evelyn Wang's awareness of freedom this study seeks to analyze how her persona reflects Søren Kierkegaard's philosophy of existential despair.

The protagonist of the movie is Evelyn Wang, a woman who is overburdened by her self-doubt and the demands of her job and family. Her life turns into a dull routine with unfulfilled dreams and ongoing discontent, which eventually causes her to experience existential despair. Evelyn must navigate the absurdity and unpredictability of life while juggling the need to live up to others' expectations and the desire to remain true to herself (Kwan and Scheinert, 2022).

Evelyn finds herself abruptly thrown into a multiverse adventure where she has to communicate with different incarnations of herself to face Jobu Tupaki, a formidable foe. She must make tough choices during this experience, and she is constantly clouded by doubt, wondering if she can protect her daughter without losing herself in the process (Kwan & Scheinert, 2022).

This movie and theory were chosen because awareness of freedom and responsibility has been a part of human life. Many individuals are still having a hard time finding the balance between realizing one's own freedom and doing their duty (Hanson, 2021; Pasopati et al., 2025). This is because the more conscious a person is, the more indecisive they are to make a decision since they understand the repercussions of it.

Therefore, this article examines how Evelyn's character demonstrates her realization of her independence and freedom throughout the movie, as well as how it impacts her relationship and personal growth. Therefore, in order to demonstrate Evelyn's struggle to find meaning, movie script examples from the dialogues and gestures are used.

## 2. Literature Review

### Significance of Existential Despair Regarding Awareness of Freedom and Responsibility

When people realize that life has no intrinsic meaning and that they are the only ones who can create or make it, existential despair sets in. This despair, according to Kierkegaard (1980), arises from the knowledge of one's potential and the fear of not becoming one's actual self. People are encouraged to consider their freedom and the decisions they must make, which is an essential step toward self-awareness and authenticity.

Desperation and the knowledge of one's freedom and responsibility are closely related. People must accept the consequences of their decisions after realizing they have the freedom to choose. In *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, Evelyn's journey illustrates how despair, rather than liberation, results from the weight of limitless possibilities. Her development results from realizing that freedom entails making deliberate, responsible decisions rather than having an endless array of options.

Therefore, the more aware the person is, the more will they have, and the more will create a better understanding of self. If the person has so much will, s/he will also have great self-consciousness (Firzatullah et al., 2025; Grøn, 2022; Wijaya et al., 2025). By that, it means even if they have free will to choose, the choices will still be limited due to some reason. Thus, because of the awareness of the individuals, it is quite hard to balance between freedom and/or responsibility with desires, needs, and abilities.

Understanding of own self is never taken for granted. It is always going through such processes that many times are hurtful than ever. It is also common that existential meaning is the despair itself since what is understood should always be examined again and again. This is also such senses in today's post-modernism in which such definitions must not always be totally believed (Firzatullah et al., 2025; Grøn, 2022; Wijaya et al., 2025). Meanings are thing being embraced through practice, not by concepts yet theories. Those walk together with human beings through the process of denying and accepting various following truths of responsibility being born.

Kierkegaard is someone who writes, and lives, through his existential meanings. He is a brave person that gives example how living is actually full of obstacles. If there is any easiness, Kierkegaard will say that the person's life must be dependent to other persons (Farashifah et al., 2025; Oguji, 2025; Pasopati et al., 2024). To be firm in own existential meanings, people should find their true selves by being a hero that must fall beforehand and rise afterwards. Indeed, by keeping questioning, people soon realize that life is like a quest. Finishing one quest will get prize at the end but also enact another in the following until the hero dies at the end. Yet, world keeps going on since new growing sprouts will come out and get involved in his/her existential findings in the latter processes (Farashifah et al., 2025; Oguji, 2025; Pasopati et al., 2024).

### 3. Research Methodology

The textual data of *Everything Everywhere All at Once* movie script are examined in this study using a qualitative methodology. The study examines Evelyn's awareness of freedom and responsibility amid existential despair, concentrating on her attempts to mend her broken relationship with her family while handling her obligations. By applying Søren Kierkegaard's idea of awareness of freedom and responsibility within existential despair, the analysis seeks to show how Evelyn's persona represents dilemmas related to responsibility and choice. The study closely examines the interactions between the main characters in order to support this analysis, drawing on a few chosen quotes, dialogues, and character expressions.

### 4. Findings

#### **Evelyn's Existential Despair in *Everything Everywhere All at Once***

The character Evelyn Quan Wang who is aware of her personal freedom struggles with existential despair in Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert's movie *Everything Everywhere All at Once*. Evelyn's sense of hopelessness throughout the narrative stems from her understanding that she is solely accountable for her decisions. Decision-making becomes challenging as a result of this awareness since she grows more aware of the constraints and

limitless opportunities that prevent her from exercising her freedom to the fullest (Kwan & Scheinert, 2022). She finds it difficult to juggle her responsibilities as a wife, mother, daughter, and individual. The following quotation captures Evelyn's relentless and ambiguous quest for purpose.

#### **Data 1**

"You know I always mix the words. "He", "she". In Chinese, there is one word, *tā*?, so simple. The way you two dress, I don't think I'm the only one calling him "he"... I mean her "him"... "  
(Act 4)

Evelyn may unintentionally refer to Becky as "he." But instead of expressing regret, she gets defensive and claims that it is simpler in Chinese because there is just one word—"tā"—to identify a person as either male or female. She also points out that people misgender Becky and Joy because of the way they dress. Since she is aware of this in her family, she has no regrets at all. Because it goes against the values she holds, she believes Becky and Joy are the ones acting out of character (Kwan & Scheinert, 2022).

#### **Data 2**

"Wait. Wait." Today, no time for wait." (Act 5)

Joy requests that her mother pause for a moment so that she can hear what she has to say. However, Evelyn insists there is no time to wait and continues to walk instead. It is because she has a lot of things she wants to do. She feels sufficiently occupied and busy. As a result, Evelyn has no space to pause and hear what Joy has to say. She believes it is less significant than the tasks she has ahead of her (Kwan & Scheinert, 2022).

#### **Data 3**

"... He wants to be an actor like you did. Maybe you can audition too." (Act 8, Scene 1)

While they are conversing, Waymond says that Rick aspires to be an actor like Evelyn. Waymond advises Evelyn, who formerly aspired to be an actress, to try the audition as well. For various reasons, Evelyn is unable to follow her dream. She imagines that she is the one who appears on the television as she gazes at it with longing. When she fulfills one of her dreams, she imagines how content her life will be (Kwan & Scheinert, 2022).

#### **Data 4**

"... A flash of longing comes across her face" (Act 8, Scene 1)

After that, Evelyn starts to long for her dreams. She keeps a careful eye on the TV as it shows the two performers dancing. She appears both joyful and sad. Although she is content since she recalls her aspirations to become an actor, she also feels sad that she is unable to be the television performer she is. However, she has a different future ahead of

her. She currently operates a laundromat here with her husband and daughter (Kwan & Scheinert, 2022).

#### **Data 5**

"If I have to think about one more thing today my head will explode." (Act 13)

Evelyn acknowledges that she is thinking about plenty of things, including her husband, child, receipts, and a lot more. She thinks too much already and feels as though her head will blow up if she has to think about anything else. Although she understands, she finds it difficult to relax. Time does not wait for her. Therefore, she is unable to unwind and take a vacation. Even if it drains a significant amount of her mental and physical energy, she does not want to waste any time by doing nothing (Kwan & Scheinert, 2022).

#### **Data 6**

"If you abandon this family for that silly boy, then we will abandon you." (Act 14, Scene 5)

It occurs when Evelyn must decide between her lover and her family. She is threatened by her father that he and her mother will leave her if she chooses that boy over her family. The thought of Evelyn abandoning her family for a man bothers her father. He thinks family should come first. Thus, if Evelyn is certain and willing, he challenges her to actually leave them. Evelyn does go with it, even though her father might have underestimated it (Kwan & Scheinert, 2022).

#### **Data 7**

"Of course. I am here. Just thinking." (Act 15)

When the auditor, Deirdre, inquires Evelyn's attention. Evelyn pretends to be listening, but she does not seem so. She is too preoccupied with the message that Alpha Waymond sends her in the elevator to focus on the issues in front of her. She debates whether to listen to Alpha Waymond that her universe is in jeopardy or to Deirdre's explanation of the receipts. She is having a hard time making decisions (Kwan & Scheinert, 2022).

#### **Data 8**

"I am a singer." (Act 15)

In an attempt to get Deirdre to consider her tax neglect, she lies once more by claiming to be a singer. She believes it might help her escape, or at the very least, lessen the severity of her punishment. She fears that Deirdre may become irate with her or make things worse. Evelyn knows she has angered Deirdre from the beginning and that she should have listened to her when she speaks, but she does not. Now, she is making matters worse by lying once more (Kwan & Scheinert, 2022).

### **Data 9**

"... because based on what you're trying to deduct, it looks like you're also a novelist, a chef, a— Up, up, up... let me finish. A teacher, a singing coach, a..." (Act 15)

Evelyn appears to lie frequently in order to evade further disasters. But now that Deirdre discovers her deception, it just seems to get worse. Deirdre can no longer succumb to deception because this is not the first time Evelyn has made an excuse. Evelyn lies in the hope that the punishment will be less severe since she does not want to face the repercussions. Unfortunately, Evelyn apparently makes a mistake in her calculations (Kwan & Scheinert, 2022).

### **Data 10**

"Mrs. Wang, I'm sure you have a lot on your mind, but I cannot imagine anything mattering more than this conversation we are having right now concerning your tax liability..." (Act 16, Scene 1)

Since Evelyn might be thinking of anything else, Deirdre attempts to stay optimistic about her. Nevertheless, Deirdre reassures her that for the time being, this tax issue is more important than any other issue she may be facing. But it appears Evelyn is preoccupied with something else. She simply cannot stop thinking about other things, even if the issues she is facing are unquestionably more pressing. Her confusion and vertigo are heightened by Alpha Waymond's abrupt appearance, which does not help the situation (Kwan & Scheinert, 2022).

### **Data 11**

"I know. I am paying attention." (Act 16, Scene 1)

Evelyn asserts once more that she has been paying attention and listening, but this is dishonest. She continues to struggle with her thoughts on a regular basis. She feels puzzled and finds it difficult to concentrate on the talk with Deirdre because she is distracted by something in her head. She claims to listen to Deirdre even though she does not in order to avoid escalating her annoyance. She is aware that both sides are in a serious and disagreeable predicament. Thus, she tells lies in order to prevent further conflict (Kwan & Scheinert, 2022).

### **Data 12**

"I know you have a lot of things on your mind, but nothing could possibly matter more than this..." (Act 16)

Alpha Waymond is dragging Evelyn to a different universe. He clarifies that there is a threat to both her universe and the other universe. Even if Evelyn has another issue, he tries to persuade her that this one is more important. Similar to what Deirdre says, she is perplexed by both claims and is unsure which to focus on. Whether her universe, where she needs to

help herself with her issue with Deirdre, or the other universe, which needs her to help them (Kwan & Scheinert, 2022).

### Data 13

"I'm thinking—" (Act 16, Scene 1)

Evelyn is still attempting to balance two worlds—her own universe and Alpha Waymond's realm—while everyone in the room waits for her to decide how to respond to Deirdre. She claims that she is still debating and is most likely too confused to decide. Her thoughts seem disorganized. Even though she is still struggling to comprehend the entire circumstance where Alpha Waymond claims she must beat a villain, she has remained loyal to tries to listen to him (Kwan & Scheinert, 2022).

### Data 14

"Shhhh, I think my other husband is messing up the audit—" (Act 16)

Evelyn and Alpha Waymond are back together, but she becomes confused once more because, she believes that her husband is ruining the audit. When in reality, Waymond is attempting to assist her in negotiating with Deirdre. She views Waymond as an annoyance who might aggravate the dispute and believes he is powerless to assist her. She is too preoccupied with Alpha Waymond to give the situation her full attention. She is unaware that it may be fixed effectively if she would simply listen to what Deirdre has to say. However, without really making a choice, she is trapped in both universes (Kwan & Scheinert, 2022).

### Data 15

"Yes, yes of course, everything is very very okay. But I think I forgot something at home—" (Act 17)

Deirdre gives Evelyn a final warning in both her realm and the alternate universe. In the alternate dimension, Deirdre is quite aggressive, which surprises Evelyn. She returns her attention to the receipts and her current predicament. To avoid raising suspicions about herself and her covert discussion with Alpha Waymond from the other universe, she attempts to be normal and makes up the excuse that she has forgotten something at home (Kwan & Scheinert, 2022).

## 5. Discussion

### **Evelyn's Awareness of Freedom and Responsibility in *Everything Everywhere All at Once***

This section discusses how Evelyn's awareness of freedom and responsibility in *Everything Everywhere All at Once* reveals behind her existential despair. These aspects are further explained in the data analysis below.

In **Data 1**, the text above indicates Evelyn's awareness of freedom and responsibility. Evelyn has the choice to choose the way she acts towards her daughter because of the freedom and responsibility that she has. When she chooses to misgender Becky, it shows that she is aware of her freedom and responsibility. However, she chooses to call her "him" because she has the same values that her father taught her. She feels the need to follow this specific value. Therefore, it shows that she is aware of her freedom and responsibilities (Kierkegaard in Mulenga, 2021; Pasopati et al., 2025).

In **Data 2**, Evelyn feels that she has to grapple with her responsibility and freedom when her daughter asks a little for her time. However, she is aware that she has every right to refuse her daughter's request due to her responsibility to do chores (Farashifah et al., 2025; Oguji, 2025; Pasopati et al., 2024). She understands that she also has a responsibility over her daughter, but she prioritizes the other duty. Therefore, it shows Evelyn's awareness of freedom and responsibility.

In **Data 3**, when Waymond mentions that Evelyn could audition to be an actress, she has a hint of hesitation. Instead of listening to Waymond's idea, she is back doing her duty in her laundromat. It portrays her awareness of freedom and responsibility. She chooses her responsibility over her freedom because she feels tied or attached to her current situation (Kierkegaard in Mulenga, 2021).

In **Data 4**, Evelyn's action portrays the realization of her freedom and responsibility. When she finds herself longing for her dreams, she tries to bring herself back. She remembers the reality of her life where she has the role to take care of the laundromat and her family. It brings her back to her responsibility. That points out that Evelyn is aware of her freedom and responsibility (Kierkegaard in Mulenga, 2021).

In **Data 5**, Evelyn feels overwhelmed with all of the tasks she has done every day. She does not want to think any more of anything that could make her head explode. She feels the need to limit herself, as she is conscious of her freedom. Therefore, it indicates Evelyn's awareness of freedom and responsibility (Kierkegaard in Mulenga, 2021; Pasopati et al., 2025).

In **Data 6**, when her father challenges her to leave her family for Waymond, Evelyn knows that she has a decision to make, whether to follow her hearts or obey her father. She realizes she has a right to make choices because of her freedom. Therefore, her action emphasizes awareness of freedom and responsibility because she knows that the choices are in her hand (Kierkegaard, 1980).

In **Data 7**, Evelyn realizes that she has to evaluate her choices before making a decision to answer Deirdre. It indicates Evelyn's awareness when she recognizes that there should be a balance between using her own freedom and abiding by external or outside norms (Kierkegaard, 1980).

In **Data 8**, Evelyn has the chance to admit that she is wrong and come true with her mistake. However, she makes up an excuse instead of doing so. That points out how Evelyn uses her freedom as a form of her free will. Therefore, Evelyn's action of choosing to cover for herself instead of saying the truth emphasizes her awareness of freedom and responsibility (Kierkegaard, 1980).

In **Data 9**, Evelyn's action from the quotation above can be categorized as awareness of freedom and responsibility. From Deirdre's statement, it highlights Evelyn's action of making up an excuse which happens so many times. This portrays that Evelyn is conscious of her right and obligation before making a decision. Thus, making her feel certain to choose the way she acts, no matter the end results (Kierkegaard in Mulenga, 2021; Pasopati et al., 2025).

In **Data 10**, Evelyn has not been paying attention when she should be. It shows that she could not manage to fulfil her responsibility. She has every right to do everything she wants as a form of her free will without damaging the balance of her freedom and responsibility. However, she has a hard time making decisions because both choices are crucial. Therefore, it shows that Evelyn has an awareness of freedom and responsibility (Kierkegaard in Mulenga, 2021)

In **Data 11**, Evelyn's action shows her attempt to manage her freedom within the limitations of her circumstances, it suggests that she understands the line between her freedom and responsibility. By saying that she pays attention, she asserts her right to control the conversation as she sees fit while still doing her obligation to seem involved in the conversation. As Evelyn strikes a balance between her need and demand placed on her by her social responsibilities, it emphasizes the conflict between freedom and duty which shows her awareness (Kierkegaard in Mulenga, 2021)

In **Data 12**, the quotation demonstrates Evelyn's awareness of freedom and responsibility. Because it emphasizes the priority of what is seen most important among conflicting concerns, it demonstrates her understanding of freedom and responsibility (Farashifah et al., 2025; Oguji, 2025; Pasopati et al., 2024). While acknowledging the weight of numerous obligations, Evelyn has to choose one task to prioritize which shows her realization to put a balance between the freedom and the obligation. This shows that even while Evelyn is free to decide where to focus her attention, those decisions have weight and consequences (Kierkegaard, 1980).

In **Data 13**, the text prolongs Evelyn's awareness of freedom and responsibility because the act of "thinking" shows Evelyn's attempt to deliberate and make a decided choice. It suggests her understanding of freedom and responsibility through her action to weigh options before making a decision. Evelyn's action shows her effort to make a balance between freedom and the internal or external forces affecting the decision-making process (Kierkegaard, 1980).

In **Data 14**, Evelyn tries to reclaim control after she thinks her husband is messing up the audit. She realizes her responsibility to play part in taking over her husband and also expressing her freedom to handle the problem. This highlights Evelyn's attempt to navigate her freedom and responsibility as a person in charge (Kierkegaard, 1980; Pasopati et al., 2025).

In **Data 15**, Evelyn's decision to make up an excuse is an act of free will, and her needs to fulfil her responsibility towards social norms shapes her control towards her own responsibility. This action emphasizes her awareness of freedom related to the shown responsibility. She gets lost in some conversations with Deirdre because she thinks a lot of things in her mind. Many times, she tries to escape her awareness by being distracted, but

her free will make her return to the real base. This idea points out to her choice later to reclaim control of her own awareness as part of her existential matters (Kierkegaard, 1980).

## 6. Conclusion

Evelyn Wang's journey in *Everything Everywhere All at Once* illustrates the existential weight that results from realizing one's freedom and the obligations that go along with it. Evelyn is compelled to acknowledge that her life is the product of innumerable choices, each of which has an impact on both herself and those around her as she travels through the multiverse and meets different incarnations of herself. This realization does not immediately provide her with clarity or comfort; rather, it forces her to face the weight of responsibility and the weight of choice. The movie shows how acknowledging complete freedom is inextricably linked to having the responsibility to act with intention and take charge of one's own destiny. Evelyn's transformation ultimately results from realizing that freedom demands bravery and that real growth starts with accepting both possibility and responsibility, not from running away from her reality.

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