

Waddling for Quack: Duck Pond Performances and the Eternal Ambiguity of Waiting

Alex Ponder PhD,
Professor Mallardus Quackwell

Abstract: Ducks are often observed at ponds producing their enigmatic "quack," a sound that carries both immediacy and mystery. This study proposes that their idling, paired with the recurring invocation of "quack," constitutes an intricate act of performance art. "Quack" may signify many things: a call, an answer, a need, or perhaps nothing at all. The meaning of what "Quack" truly is—or whether it exists as anything more than a sound—is left entirely ambiguous, inviting the observer to project their own interpretation. By turning waiting, performative sound, and circular behaviors into rituals of existential contemplation, ducks manifest a profound meditation on the nature of meaning, connection, and the ambiguity of expectation. This essay situates the ducks' performance within a broad philosophical framework, drawing parallels to the thinking of Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Camus, Nietzsche, and Derrida as a way of exploring the elusive nature of "Quack."

Keywords: *duck,*

Introduction: Waiting for "Quack"

In parks, ponds, and rivers, ducks are often heard quacking—a sound that seems both mundane and deeply intentional. They float, waddle, and occasionally vocalize this single syllable again and again: "quack." To human observers, this might seem unremarkable. Yet, upon closer examination, the repetition of this sound frames a curious existential mystery. What, precisely, is a "quack"? Why do ducks appear to invoke it so frequently? And, most importantly, are they waiting for "Quack" itself to manifest as something more?

The philosophical act of "waiting" has long been central to existential thought. Søren Kierkegaard's writings on faith frame waiting as an act of infinite resignation—an acceptance of the absurdity and uncertainty of life, paired with a leap toward an inaccessible truth. The conceptual ambiguity of "Quack" echoes this dynamic: in endlessly repeating "Quack," ducks may enact a form of existential faith, waiting for the arrival of something that might justify their

longing. Yet, as Kierkegaard cautions, the object of the wait always remains elusive, a promised “something” that never materializes. Through their rituals, ducks mirror human striving for meaning in a chaotic, indifferent world, where the act of waiting becomes its own form of meaning.

This essay argues that the ducks’ behavior at the pond—marked by waiting, repetition, and mysterious invocations—constitutes an existential performance centering on the ineffable concept of “Quack.” Much like a symbolically loaded mantra, “Quack” resists definition. Whether it represents hope, purpose, or mere noise, the ritual of quacking dramatizes the human tendency to look for meaning even in the meaningless.

Quacking in the Void: Ritual, Absurdity, and Camus

The defining feature of ducks’ mysterious performance is their invocation of “Quack.” It is a sound that appears to signify something—though we can never be certain what—but which ultimately leads nowhere. Albert Camus, in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, describes the human experience as a confrontation with the absurd: our search for meaning in a world that offers none. Ducks, in their invocation of “Quack,” appear to engage in a similarly Sisyphean act. Each quack is an attempt to communicate something or call something into being, yet no clear response ever arrives. The persistent repetition of “Quack” mirrors Sisyphus eternally rolling the boulder up the hill, only to have it roll back again.

For Camus, the absurd hero is one who embraces the lack of inherent meaning while continuing to strive for it nonetheless. Perhaps, then, ducks are performing their own version of absurd heroism. They do not cease quacking even though “Quack”—whatever it may signify—remains forever deferred. This persistence transforms their otherwise ordinary sounds into a powerful statement of resistance against the void.

Waddling and Waiting: Heidegger’s Temporality and Being-in-the-World

Beyond their vocal invocations, ducks are frequently observed waiting: floating on the water, paddling in circles, sitting motionless on the shore. This brings to mind Martin Heidegger’s concept of *being-towards-death*, in which human existence is defined by an orientation toward an ultimate, unknowable future. For Heidegger, this awareness of the temporal horizon—in which death represents the inevitable endpoint—gives structure to human life. The ducks’ waiting, similarly, seems to evoke an unresolved anticipation. Their stillness suggests vigilance, as if they are poised for something significant to occur. Yet, as with Heidegger’s human subject, their waiting is never definitively rewarded.

In the context of Heidegger’s temporal theory, “Quack” could signify not a specific moment in time, but the very structure of anticipation itself: a way of living on the edge of presence and absence, constantly reaching toward a future that may remain forever out of reach. When the



ducks wait, they do not merely pass time; they enact a profound engagement with time as a phenomenon.

Nietzsche and the Eternal Return: The Cycle of “Quack”

The ducks’ daily cycles of quacking, swimming, and waiting also echo Friedrich Nietzsche’s doctrine of the eternal return, the idea that existence repeats infinitely in a cyclical loop. Nietzsche challenges us to confront life with the awareness that every moment will return again and again, eternally. When viewed through this lens, the ducks’ invocations of “Quack” become a poignant metaphor for eternal recurrence. Each quack, though fleeting, contains the weight of an infinite repetition.

But what if the ducks, unlike Nietzsche’s ideal human, are not reconciled to this eternal cycle? Is “Quack” their lament for the impossibility of change, the sound of a despairing acceptance of their endless return? Or does the act of quacking itself—regardless of its meaning—justify the cycle, turning each “Quack” into a defiant affirmation of existence? Once again, the observer is left to interpret.

Derrida and the Impossibility of Full Presence: “Quack” as Trace

Jacques Derrida’s theory of deconstruction offers another way to interpret “Quack,” particularly in its resistance to definitive meaning. For Derrida, language is defined by an infinite play of deferrals; words never fully mean what they signify and are instead defined by their difference from other words. In this framework, “Quack” functions not as a coherent signifier but as a *trace*—a hint of meaning that remains tantalizingly out of reach, forever deferring its resolution.

Ducks quack to one another, but their quacking does not seem to achieve communicative closure. Instead, it multiplies uncertainty, creating a web of fragmented sounds and ambiguities. Observers, too, are caught up in this web, interpreting “Quack” through the filter of their own longings, yet never able to pin down what “Quack” truly is. In this sense, “Quack” is not merely a call but an absence, a sound that marks the gap between presence and meaning.

The Observer: Projecting Meaning into Ambiguity

As Kierkegaard, Camus, Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Derrida all suggest in their own ways, meaning is as much about the search as it is about the object being sought. The ducks’ performance invites human observers to reflect on the act of interpretation itself. Watching ducks waddle, quack, and float in apparent aimlessness, we impose our own meanings onto their actions: they are waiting, hoping, lamenting, or signaling. Yet the truth may be altogether more mundane—or, paradoxically, more profound in its mundanity. In projecting our existential questions onto the ducks, we become complicit in their ritual, turning the banal into the sublime.



Conclusion: Waiting for Quack

Through their endless quacking and waiting, ducks at the pond create an ambiguous, open-ended performance that mirrors the paradoxes of existence. “Quack” resists definition, transcending its context as a call or sound to evoke the persistent, unreachable unknown. From Kierkegaard’s notion of infinite resignation to Derrida’s play of deferrals, the ducks’ actions invoke a rich philosophical lineage, reminding us that life is as much about the waiting as it is about the answer—if, indeed, such an answer exists. Ducks, it seems, are not merely part of nature; they are performers in the theater of existence, waddling patiently on the edge of the eternal question: what is “Quack”?