



The Prophets of Hope and Survival in the 20th Century Absurdities

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Dr. Mohammad Tariq

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Lucknow

Preface

Concisely speaking, the whole phenomenon of existential discourse, as a matter of fact, starts from the rejection of the validity of general concepts i.e. ‘goodness’ or ‘beauty’. Earlier in idealistic philosophy, these concepts were regarded as real, therefore, anything that was assumed to be good or beautiful, it was a reflection, a particle of ‘good’ or the ‘beautiful’. The eternal essence was based on the Platonic ideals. But since the second phase of existential philosophers argue that these Platonic ideas and these eternal essences are actually mere abstractions form of the “concrete”. They claim that *the priori* must always be the “concrete”, the object existing; therefore, existence in this way would come before the essence. General truths and ethical systems, therefore, are claimed mere illusions. Each individual is supposed to work out his/her won situation by his/her own ‘self’. So, as a result, individuals become utterly alone because everything comes only from the ‘self’ not form the outside. The quality of individual’s experience is decisive and each individual has his/her own sense of ‘being’.

Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* and Sartre’s *No Exit* constitute the same exploration of ‘being’ or ‘existing’. This dissertation was an attempt to examine the plays as literary expositions of existential philosophy. The dissertation primarily aimed to define and discuss 20th century existentialism as a result of wars and bloodshed. The dissertation has an Introduction, a Conclusion and one chapter each dealing with the plays mentioned above.

I cannot claim any expertise in the subject as I was only an MA Semester IV student then (2010-2011), I tried my best to understand and critically analyze the theme of ‘Existentialism’ in both the plays to the best of my ability and existing knowledge. The errors still present in the dissertation are purely mine. I further wish to state that I do not claim any originality as apart from books, helps were taken from notes, web sources, books, guides and lectures in synthesizing and writing the dissertation.

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List of Abbreviations

<i>BN</i>	<i>Being and Nothingness</i>
<i>NE</i>	<i>No Exit</i>
<i>EHE</i>	<i>Existentialism and Human Emotion</i>
<i>WG</i>	<i>Waiting for Godot</i>
<i>MS</i>	<i>The Myth of Sisyphus</i>
<i>SP</i>	<i>Story of Philosophy</i>
<i>TA</i>	<i>The Theatre of the Absurd</i>

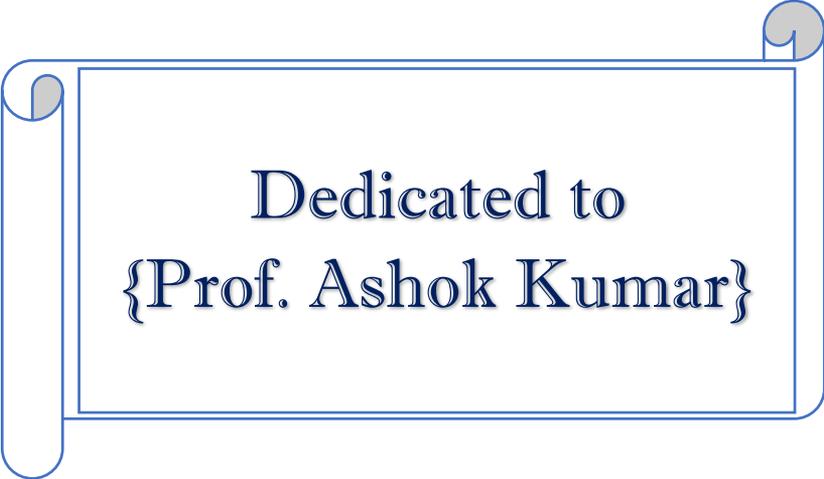
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Dedicated to
{Prof. Ashok Kumar}



Plato and Aristotle Reflecting on Their Basic and Distinctive Ideas

Chapter - 1

Existentialism, Identity Formation and the State of Godlessness

Introduction

The final conclusion of the absurdist protest is, in fact, the rejection of suicide and persistence in that hopeless encounter between human questioning and the silence of the universe”.

-Albert Camus, the rebel: an essay on man in revolt (1951)

1.1 Historical and intellectual background

Last two centuries have been one of the most productive and destructive periods. The Socio-cultural factors weighed heavily on the mind and imagination of the writers and thinkers all over the world. The life of man has in many ways been highly affected. The destructive impact of wars, technological advancement, the mutual distrust created by materialism, violence, animosity and alienation has greatly affected the cultural and spiritual growth of modern man and has left him in a void, tracing to seek solace in treacheries, cowardice and hypocrisy. These negative attributes of human conduct compelled mankind commit blunders that ultimately disturbed their mental peace and harmony. In return, it produced discomfort, depression and frustration as a whole.

Existentialism thus became unquestionably one of the most outstanding intellectual movements of the twentieth century. It appears to be the most fashionable philosophy in the whole of Europe during the period immediately following WW I and WW II. It flourished not only in universities but in the worlds of quality journalism and café intellectuals, in poems, novels, plays, films, common cabarets and night-clubs.

The philosophy of existentialism focused on the question of concrete identity of human beings rather than hypnotizing human essence stressing that human essence is determined through their life choices. Sometimes the individual finds his own identity a problem and hopes to uncover meaning in life through investigating the mystery of his/her own existence. Existential philosophy is centered on “What is it to be in the world?” The term essence

and existence denote something active rather than passive. These two words are closely dependent on the Latin root *ex*, *outs*+ *sister* from *stare*, 'to stand.' Thus the term existentialism means 'pertaining to existence,' or, in logic 'predicating existence.' Philosophically, the term existentialism is applied to a vision of the condition and existence of man, his place and function in the world.

1.2 Different orientation of the existential thought

Existentialism appeared as a result of the First and Second World Wars when the whole of the Europe of that time was reeling under the bloodshed and massacre of the humans. Everything was burning as never before. The ashes of the wars and the outrage destroyed and smashed the whole human social, political, intellectual, cultural and traditional European set-up. Thus, man started to ponder on the enigma of his own existence and values. The purpose of life was discussed as never before. The philosophy of existentialism tried to assess 'man' with his whole being. It endeavors to explore such fundamental issues as "what is man?", "What is his status in this world?", "Where does he come from?" (The origin), "What are the tools that judge a human personality"? The philosophy of existentialism provides answers to such questions. Primarily there is a basic division in the 20th century literario-philosophical approaches in the following manner:

1. Existentialism (theistic/atheistic)
2. Absurdist approach
3. Nihilism

Sometimes the theistic and atheistic existential philosophies are also called as Christian Existentialism; humorist existentialism, rationalism, or transcendentalism etc. The founder of theistic existential philosophy is generally held to be a Danish thinker named Soren Kierkegaard (1813-55). He emerged onto the intellectual stage after the death of the dominant philosopher of the age who was found recently dead. This was Georg William Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) who thought what existence primarily consisted off and later declared that "the finite has no genuine being." He coined a term "Geist," by which he meant 'midway between the mind and spirit'. Its connotations are more mental than the English word "spirit" and more spiritual than the English word "mind." For Hegel, "Geist" is the very stuff of existence, the ultimate essence of being, and the entire historical process that constitute reality in the development of "Geist" towards self-awareness and self-knowledge. If we examine, we find that this argument of his is totally rational. According to him, "the real is the rational and the rational is the real." The term "Geist"

brings us close to Socrates (470-399 Bs), to his famous dictum “know thy self.” Hegel is of the view that when this “State” is reached all that exist will be harmoniously at one with itself. Hegel calls it the self-awareness of everything, “the absolute.” Hegel views that essentially the stuff of what exist as something non-material and declares that “man owes his entire existence of the “State.” Hegel’s philosophy came to be known as “Absolute Idealism.” Hegel himself combined this philosophy with belief in Christianity. Although some of his followers embraced it as a kind of Pantheism and others as a sort of religion without God. His philosophy is also known as Hegelianism.

1.3 Theistic existentialism

The founder of modern Existentialism, the Danish philosopher Kierkegaard wrote his philosophy in contradiction to Hegel, especially in his books like *Fear and Trembling* (1843), *The Concept of Dread* (1848) and *Sickness unto Death* (1848). His main philosophical idea was that everything that actually exists is something uniquely individual and, therefore, it is impossible to capture the truth about reality in general statements and it is a mistake to have abstract systems of philosophy at all. Kierkegaard acknowledged that Hegel was the dominant thinker of the age, but considered him hopelessly wrong. Kierkegaard views that Hegel explained everything in terms of huge and great sweeps of ideas in which actual things and individual entities are not even so much as mentioned, whereas, the fact is that it is only individual things that exists. Abstraction, generalization, does not exist in the same sense. They are aids what we invent for ourselves in order to be able to think and make connections. If we want to understand what does exist, then, we have to find some ways of coming to terms with uniquely individual entities, because that is all there is. This is especially true of human beings, Hegel had seen the individual as fulfilling himself only when absorbed into the large and more abstract entity of the organic “State”, whereas in fact, says Kierkegaard, it is the individual himself who is the supreme moral entity, and, therefore, it is personal subjective aspects of human life that are most important because of the transcending values of moral consideration. The most important human activity is *decision making*. It is through the *choice* we make; we create our times and become ourselves. For Kierkegaard, all this had religious implications, he believed in the central tradition of protestant Christianity, that what mattered more than anything else was the relationship of the individual soul to God.

Thus, the theistic branch of existential philosophy was propounded by Soren Kierkegaard, commonly known as the father of theistic existentialism. He published numerous philosophical and theological works. In his works, he

categorizes existence in three spheres that he formulated to trace the process of becoming an individual. These are also called the three stages of life of Kierkegaard; they are as mentioned:

- 1) The Aesthetic Stage
- 2) The Ethical Stage
- 3) The Religious Stage

Each stage has its own model as it befits a morality tale of Don Juan. After Kierkegaard, theistic existential thought was greatly expanded at the beginning of the 20th century by Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973), a Parisian all his life was a convert to Catholicism; he maintained a strongly religious detention. In reaction to the dominant idealistic philosophy of his day, he wished to be a philosopher of the concrete, and published his book *The Mystery of Being* (1925). Another theistic existentialist was Karl Jaspers (1883-1969 a German, the first to call his approach ‘Existenz philosophy’ and focused on limited situations as suffering guilt and death. He was removed from Professorship in 1937 by the Nazis. In atheistic existentialism, Gabriel Marcel was the first person to apply the term existentialist to Jean Paul Sartre.

All existentialists discussed above were theistic; they held the notion that *essence precedes existence*. By this, they mean that at the time of our birth we don't have any identity of our own and bear the stigma of being imperfect. But since there is Jesus Christ, the Messiah, they believe, that the father, the son of God is the only perfect man the only one born with an identity. They believe Jesus Christ to be infinite, who possesses extra ordinary abilities and is considered the man's Savior and role model. Thus man is born imperfect with certain limitations, his whole being and indeed his purpose of life is to reach as near as possible to Christ, the Messiah.

Earlier, when Kierkegaard had envisioned the philosophy of existentialism was the most part re-stating and elaborating upon the belief that through God man may find freedom from the existential tension, discontent, anguish and despair of being, therefore, man should find peace of mind and spiritual serenity. This was the idea that had prevailed in many of the pioneers of the modern Christian Existentialism.

1.4 The dialectics of essence and existence

To understand the whole phenomenon of existential philosophy, two words require prime importance as mentioned above i.e. essence and existence. The essence of a thing is what that thing *is* and this would be a separate matter from the question whether or not it *exists*. We can make it

simple with an example which may make it clear. *Supposing* by a child says to the mother “What is a Unicorn?” the mother could reply, horse, usually white, with a long straight or spiral horn sticking up out of his head.” If the child then says, “Do the Unicorns exist?” you would have to say “No, they don’t.” In this example the first of the mother’s two answers would have addressed itself to the question of essence and the second to existence. If the child goes on to ask the mother about tigers the mother can vividly describe tigers to her child, yet however, extensive and detailed your description be the child still has to ask mother “Do they exist?” because from the description itself, the child has no way of knowing whether they exist or not is always a separate question and about which he has to ask his mother separately. If a thing is only essence, it has the potential for existence, but its existence is not yet, actually, assuming that God made the world in accordance with his wishes, the world’s essence must have preceded its existence. But God’s own essence could not have preceded his existence, so God must be, so to speak, pure existence.

Generation of philosophers was to dispute over the question of which is prior: essence or existence. As so often, in the history of philosophy, one side of this dispute turns out to have natural affinities with Plato, the other with Aristotle. The notion that essence must always precede existence derives obvious support from Plato’s theory of “Ideal Forms” while apparently, on the contrary assertion, the only from of our knowledge of already existing objects can be derived by the notion whatsoever of essence and that any individual object needs first to exist, before it can possibly possess any of the characteristics or attribute to it by a knowing subject is filled in comfortably with an Aristotelian Approach. Usually, there are some similar terms with distinct differences such as the relationships between existentialism, absurdism and nihilism:

<i>Questions</i>	Atheistic existentialism	Theistic/Monot heistic existentialism	Absurdism	Nihilism
1. There is such a thing as <i>meaning</i> or <i>value</i> :	Yes.	Yes.	Maybe.	No.
2. There is inherent meaning in the universe:	No.	Yes, but the individual must have come to the knowledge of God.	Maybe, but humans can never know it.	No.
3. The <i>pursuit</i> of meaning may have meaning in itself:	Yes.	Yes.	Maybe.	No.
4. The individual’s	Yes, thus the goal	Yes, thus the	Yes, though it must be	No.

construction of any type of meaning is possible:	of existentialism.	goal of existentialism, though this meaning must incorporate God.	personal and face the Absurd; moreover, there is no way to verify whether one's constructed meaning conforms to any inherent meaning.	
5. There is resolution to the individual's desire to seek meaning:	Yes, the creation of one's own meaning.	Yes, the creation of one's own meaning involving God.	Maybe the creation of one's own meaning, but not with regard to the inherent meaning of the universe (if one exists).	No.
Reference: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Absurdism#cite_note-11				

1.5 Atheistic existentialism

The branch of Atheistic Existential philosophy was propounded by the 19th century philosophers like Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and Sartre's associate Albert Camus. Friedrich Nietzsche, a German born in Rocken, burdened with poor health for most of his life, is generally considered the father of the atheistic existentialism with his most famous pronouncement that "God is dead," probably the meaning of this statement was that modern science has rendered belief in the divine irrelevance. His self-appointed task was to combat nihilism; he succumbed to insanity during the last decades of his life. He argued that since there is no God and no world other than this one, then, morals, ethics and values cannot be whatever is called transcendental. They cannot come to us from anywhere outside of this world, for there is nowhere "else", they must be human creation. He says, once we grasp the fact that we human beings are the creators of our own values, we realize that we are free to choose whatever values are most in our interest to have. Nietzsche was the disciple of Schopenhauer he also declared that "there are no facts, only interpretation".

After Nietzsche, there appeared onto the stage of atheistic existential philosophy, the thinker name Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) born in Baden, Germany. He lived in Germany for all his life, and also remained an academician till his death. Heidegger was a leading exponent of existentialism; and is also considered to be one of the pioneers of 20th century existential philosophy. His reputation was damaged by whose support of Nazism. Heidegger's book *Sein und Zeit* (1927), translated in English in 1962 as *Being and Time*. This book remains Heidegger's well acknowledged master piece and has come to be regarded as the fountainhead of the 20th century existentialism. Besides *Being and Time*, Heidegger wrote many other

philosophical pieces such as *what is a Thing?* (1920), *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (1929), *what is Meta physics* (1929), and *what is Philosophy* (1956).

Heidegger insistently disassociated himself from existential philosophy. He said that he was concerned with the “problems of being,” not with personal existence and its ethical insert the humans condition as such Heidegger’s philosophy, therefore, the professes to the rise of the questions i. e. “What is being,” “What is what?” Heidegger’s book *being and Time* presented itself as a volume which was to be a two volume work, which was never completed. Heidegger's philosophy changed the direction of human thought and emerged as “The Early Heidegger” and the “Late Heidegger.” He was greatly influenced by the founder of phenomenology Edmund Husserl (1859-1958), who believed “consciousness is always conscious of something.” Heidegger in *being and Time* uses Husserl’s phenomenology to explore the structure of the theme of existentialism. In his book the declared purpose was to ask “What is the meaning of being?” and concluded with that “being is time.” Existence is, so to speak, embodied time, objectified time and human beings are literally time incarnate. His philosophy is centered on his key concept “Dasein”, a word which has been used ambiguously by him. “Dasein” is generally accepted as an untranslatable technical term of his philosophy. It means the mode of existence of human beings. Heidegger views that a man is possibility, that he has the power to be, his existence is his choice of possibilities which are open to him.

The mode of existence of human being, as said earlier, has a structure, it is the being in the world. This ‘being’ in the world constitutes a human being in the being of a self, in its inseparable relations with a ‘non-self’, the world of things, and other persons which the self always and necessarily finds itself interested in. Heidegger goes on to analyze the human situation; he says “we are ourselves the entities to be analyzed,” far from us starting out as isolated individuals who then face the problem of making contact with other people, our existence from the beginning is a shared and social one, and our problem is that of a becoming individuals, feeling and authentic mode, the personal existence. According to Heidegger, we are all the time pressing into an unknowable future, and having to make choices without any entity about their outcomes. Heidegger argues that the only thing we can be certain of is that we face a life of guilt, anxiety and pessimism caused by confusion and loneliness of existence. The guilt and anxiety fall to our lot, especially anxiety in the face of death. We long for our lives to have some metaphysical ground or foundation and also to have some meaning.

1.6 Meaning without god

A trend in the 20th century has been very much famous and fashionable and that is to have “Meaning without God.” This is the idea that dominates 20th century existentialism. It took on Nietzsche’s challenge and tried to confront a universe without God which tried to find a basis for values in a world without any objective significance, and without any goals or purpose of its own. It tried to find ways of discovering or creating meaning in the fleeting lives of individuals who have no afterlife. After two world wars these ideas were popularized to a degree that rarely happens with any philosophy. By the time, when World War II was nearly ending the international center was Paris, and most of the well-known existentialists moving on then from Heidegger were French.

1.7 Humanistic existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980)

The man who made existentialism known all over the world was a French called Jean-Paul Sartre. One of the most influential figures of humanistic existentialism, a native Parisian was a playwright, novelist, critic, and a political activist of the 20th century. Sartre traveled excessively throughout the world, usually with his life-long partner Simone de Beauvoir (1908-86). This name became synonymous with existentialism. Sartre was greatly influenced by Heidegger and his book *Being and Time*, and finally wrote a book called *Being Nothingness* and (1945), and a long essay entitled “Existentialism and Humanism” (1945).

Sartre and his group hold the notion that “existence precedes essence” which came to be known as atheistic existentialism. This is the issue that we have to discuss here in detail. According to Heidegger, man is thrown in to this world and is left without any identity. His life becomes a kind of struggle to obtain identity; with man’s birth comes existence, but at that moment he has no essence he has to strive and struggle; his struggle determines his essence or identity. Sartre says that “Man first of all exists and encounters himself, surges-up in the world and defines himself afterwards” (*EHE*). If man is not deniable, it is because to believe that he is nothing, he will not be anything until he will be what he makes of himself.

1.8 The ex-nihilo

Sartre believed that “man is born ex-nihilo”. The statement basically contains the idea of man’s birth that man is born out of nothing and there is nothing as his origin, but his whole life is to be something. Heidegger says “man is nothing else but what he makes of himself”. This is the first principle of existentialism, what people call subjectivity. The element of subjectivity

conveys the idea that man is indeed a project which possesses a subjective life instead of being a kind of moss, fungus, cauliflower or tree. Before that projection of the self-nothing exists, man only attains existence when he is what he proposes.

In man, Sartre states that there is a sense of accountability of subjectivity, it puts every man in possession of himself as he is to fashion him-self. It gives man freedom of action as choice, and at the same time, time places on him the entire responsibility of his choice and action. Man is responsible not only for himself, for his own individuality but also for all other fellow men. Heidegger says “in fashioning myself I fashion man.” The sense of accountability makes us very careful, meditative and pensive. We have to be very careful during our journey of life because even one-minute error has all the potential to change the course of man’s life.

Existentialism declares that man is in constant anguish since man is accountable not only for himself but also to all human beings for his actions. Hence, he lives in the shadow of continuous anxiety and anguish; therefore, Heidegger gives the example of ‘Abraham’s Metaphysical Anguish’. Since atheistic philosophy declared the absence of God, man is forlorn or abandoned as Nietzsche stated “God is dead”. The moment man takes the idea of God away; there is no one to help him out of the dilemma. There is no one who can guide him to choose the one, to show the path, to help him or to show him the way (truth) in making a decision. Thus man is in the cloud of this universe, he becomes completely alone, a lone fighter all along in life.

Fyodor Dostoevsky says “if God did not exist everything would be permitted.” Man has freedom but is condemned to be free; he has no excuse or justification for his action. Sartre writes that “we have neither behind us nor before us in a luminous realm of values or any means of justification of excuse. We are left alone without excuse.” In the state of sheer abandonment follows his instinct. He listens to his inner voice. In the end it is the feeling of the man that only counts in the journey of man’s life.

1.9 Existential ‘Despair’

Another very important notion in existentialism is ‘despair’. The meaning of this expression is extremely simple. It merely means that we limit ourselves to a reliance upon that which is within our wills or within the sum of the probabilities which render our actions feasible. Whenever one wills anything, there are always these elements of probabilities, Sartre writes “if I am counting a visit from a friend who may be coming by train or by tram, I presuppose that the train will arrive at the appointed time, or train will not be derailed.” He

further adds, “I remain in the realm of possibilities, but one does not rely upon that any possibility beyond those that are strictly concerned in one’s action. Beyond that, the point at which possibilities under consideration ceases to affect any action. Descartes once wrote that “conquer yourself rather than the world” (Rene Descartes-(1596-1650). What he meant indeed by this was that all should act without hope.

1.10 Man and the ‘Bad Faith’

As a matter of fact no other concept of existential philosophy has been as famous as the notion of “bad faith” (from French), “*Mauvaise Foi*” originally used by Sartre. By this concept he was to refer to some sort of “self-deception” about the existence of the self. The dictionary meaning of this word is an intentional dishonest act by not fulfilling legal or contractual obligations misleading another, entering into an argument without the intention, or violating the basic standards of honesty in dealing with others.

Heidegger argues that we are for the most part immersed in the average everyday where the inclination is to select our openness to ‘Being’ and to simply ‘go with the flow,’ that is to live authentically as ‘they’ do. Thus the existentialist gives a slogan “be authentic”. In an obvious allusion to the Biblical notion of ‘Original Sin’, Heidegger refers to this immersion as follows (*Die verfallenheit*). ‘Bad faith’ is to believe in anything outside, one’s own will is to be guilty of bad-faith. It is an attempt to escape anguish by pretending to over selves that we are not free; we try to conceive ourselves that we are not free. We try to conceive ourselves that our attitudes and actions are determined by our character, our situation, and our role in life or anything other than ourselves. Sartre seems to agree that our usual inclination is to deny responsibility for our situation that is to be in ‘bad faith’. This is especially true in societies where exploitation and operations are rampant, as one will later come to recognize the same. In fact, he claims that his book *being* and *Nothingness* was a phenomenological study of individuals within an alienated society. Such societies foster self-deception about the structural injustices that our practices sustain.

Two of the famous examples of ‘bad faith’ given by Sartre are that of, a girl sitting with a man who she knows very well would like to seduce her, but when he takes her hands, she tries to avoid the painful necessity of a decision to accept or reject him, by pretending not to notice leaving her hand in his as if she were not aware of it. She pretends to herself that she is a passive object, a thing other than which she really is, a conscious being that is free. The second illustration is of the café waiter who is doing his job just a little too

keenly, acting the part. If there is a “bad-faith” here, it is that he is trying to identify himself completely with the role of a waiter to pretend that this particular role determines his every action and attitude. Whereas, the truth is that he has chosen to take on the job and is free to give it up at any time. He is not essentially anything. These two examples simplify the concept “bad faith” and make us understand it easily.

The most important thing is the existential insight that humans exist in a particular situation. To exist in a situation discovers that we are an integral part of that universe and the cultural world that envelops it. Less than angels more than machines, the situation is an ambiguous mixture of what Sartre calls our ‘facticity’ and our ‘transcendence.’ ‘Facticity’ denotes the givens of our situation such as our race and nationality, our talents and limitations, the other with whom we deal as well as our previous choices. ‘Transcendence’ or the reach that our consciousness extends beyond these givens which denote the tokens of our situations, namely how we face-up to the ‘facticity’. ‘Transcendence’ functions somewhat like the intentionality of consciousness, if we understand that term in a dynamic sense. Some born with physical disability may meet the challenge in a positive and constructive manner while others may allow them to be crushed by the impairment. Sartre admits that the expression ‘situation’ is ambiguous in the sense that one cannot measure off the precise contribution of what is given and what is taken in such a situation. For example, how much of my failure to succeed in becoming a surgeon is attributable to my lack of intelligence and physical skills or my deprived socio- economic condition, ‘facticity’ and how much is due to my mental laziness and lack of discipline, ‘transcendence’. Thus, man is fundamentally in such situation, and because this situation is as flowing and ambiguous as are ‘time’ and consciousness themselves. The humans, therefore, are not stable, they are timeless identities. We are fundamentally a work in progress, a story in the process of being written. To deny this condition is to be in “bad faith,” that is why human life in demand is in demand to be narrated.

1.11 Conclusion

Finally, for existentialism, however, it has been a very concise introduction for, the subject is impossible to discuss precisely. Only certain themes, common to all existentialist writers can, however, be easily summarized. The term in a nut-shell, suggests one major theme that “existence precedes essence,” which implements that, what one is, is from his/her essence. This is the result of one’s choice, and essence is not one’s destiny. One is only what s/he makes himself or herself to be. Existentialists believe in no pre-destined meaning or order. Accordingly, one must take the

responsibility of determining the meaning and order that one gives to his/her life, therefore, in existentialism, primary stress is on concrete individual existence, and consequently on subjectivity, individual freedom and choice.

In existentialism, time is of the essence, an individual is fundamentally a time bound being, unlike measurable, 'clock'-times, and lived time is quality-time. The not yet, the 'already' and the 'present' are different amongst themselves in meaning and value. Existentialism, as declared by Sartre, is a humanism, in a new form which is person centered. Its focus is on the human individual's pursuit of identity and meaning amidst the social and economic pressure of mass society for superficiality and conformism.

Existentialism is a philosophy of freedom and responsibility. Its basis is the fact that we can stand back from our lives and reflect on what we have been doing. In this sense we are always 'more' than ourselves. There should remain responsibility with freedom. We are as responsible as we are free. Ethical considerations are also very important in our way to invite us to examine the authenticity of our personal lives and our doctrines which make human life perfect and in addition declare that every action implies a human setting and human subjectivity.

Sartre argues that nothing would be more inadequate than the objection people put against existentialism. He says that the philosophy of existentialism tells nothing else but is an attempt to make a complete conclusion from consistent atheistic position. He says that this philosophy never wants to plunge man in despair intentionally as Christians believe it to be, "an attitude of unbelief."

Sartre says, for existentialism, as Christians believe "an attitude of unbelief", is merely incorrect; therefore, existentialism describes something deferent of despair that generally people name. Sartre further argues that existentialism is not, in the sense, an atheistic approach that it would exhaust itself in demonstration of nonexistence of God. He adds that if God exists or not, it would make no difference. From the existential point of view it is not the belief that God does not exist and the real problem is not the existence of God, but the only purpose of this philosophy is to find 'man' again and understand that nothing can save 'him' from 'himself' not even a valid proof of the existence of God!



Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980)

Chapter - 2

Jean-Paul Sartre's Dramatization of the Existential Dilemma in *No Exit*

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
Signifying nothing.

(*Macbeth*, Act 5, Scene 5, lines 17-18)

2.1 Introduction

Jean Paul Charles Aymard Sartre (1905-1980) was one of the most famous and influential French existentialist philosopher, playwright, novelist, script-writer political-activist biographer and literary critic. His fictional works were generally intended as a medium through which he could explore his bigger philosophical ideas. Sartre appears to be one of the leading figures in the 20th century French philosophy of existentialism and Marxism, his works continue to influence numerous fields such as Marxist philosophy, Sociology, critical theory and literary studies. Sartre is also noted for his long relationship with the noted feminist author and social and literary theorist Simone Lucie Ernestine Marie Bertrand de Beauvoir (1908-1986).

In 1939 Sartre was drafted into the French army where he served as a meteorologist. Sartre was captured by German troops in 1940 in Padoux and he spent nine months as a prisoner of war in Nancy. This was the period he read Heidegger's *Being and Time*. Sartre was released in April 1941 and was given a civilian status and remained a teacher near Paris all over his life. Sartre

believed that philosophical arguments were most persuasive when presented as fiction. Sartre became well known for his straight-forward philosophical analysis in *Being and Nothings*. His arguments and theories are conveniently summarized in his novels, short stories and plays. For example one of his most gripping plays *No Exit* was written in 1944 just one year after *being and nothingness*. As a result, many of the themes and symbols in his plays contain Sartre's arguments in the larger and longer philosophical work.

Sartre essentially seems to be interested in the nature of existence, freedom, responsibility, angst, despair, death, consciousness and time. With the discussion of all these notions, he developed the philosophical movement of "theistic existentialism", the doctrine that "existence precedes essence". Sartre distinguished between inanimate objects or a "being-in-itself" and human consciousness or a "being-for-itself". For example a "pen", the essence of a pen here is the quality or qualities that one would use to describe it, such as its shape, colour, smoothness and weight etc. The essence of a pen results from that it plainly is. This distinction means that the observer "creates" the essence of the object simply by being conscious of it. The pen is thus "being-in-itself", its characters have been assigned to it. But person's emotions are not the same as the colour of the pen. Here, Sartre is of the view that if one is happy, it is by his or her own free choice. In this sense, humans exist and then define and choose their essence. Someone who has no fixed character consciously decides his or her essence and is thus "being- for-itself". In fact, war, tragedies atrocities, injustices, loss and disillusionments all the things influenced many Sartre's ideas. For example, the Spanish Civil War and outside economic crisis in sting acted many of his writings during 1930's. The most pathetic and the most precarious situation of World-War-II had an enormous effect on Sartre's life both philosophically and intellectually.

2.2 Politico-historical background of the play

It is generally considered by many critics to be the author's best play ever written and the most considerable dramatization of original draft in two weeks at the Café Flore in Paris entitled (*Huis Clos* in the original French). The play was first produced at the "Theatre du Vieux Colombier" in Paris in May 1944 at the time during the German occupation. Sartre deliberately wrote the play *No Exit* as a 'one act play' so that theatre goers would not be kept past the German imposed Curfew. The play is also known as *Behind Closed Doors*. The play was noted as the best foreign play in New York in 1946.

The play *No Exit* was the result of the humiliations of the defeat and the suffering of the war and occupation. In the play Sartre developed many of his

questions about the existence of man with respect to World War II. The play takes place in a single room, considered a part of hell. This place has often been described and compared with Paris during the German occupation. Thus, Sartre here examines the issues like freedom, self – deception, death, time, bad faith, man’s action, the result of man’s action, his choice and the nature of time.

2.3 The reading of the play

The play was translated by S. Gilbert as *No Exit* which is an illusion to another story about the after-life. In the play three damned souls, a man, a gay and a woman find themselves trapped in a hotel room they all seem to be brought to the same room in hell by a mysterious character Valet. Once they are in the room, they discover that they cannot get out of the room and that all their efforts to help someone are fruitless. They all expect medieval torture devices to punish them for eternity but instead they find a plain room furnished in ‘Second Empire’ style, the French Empire (1852-1870). The style known as Second Empire draws heavily on classical and baroque models, they discover a rather unpleasant dynamics among themselves. None of them will admit the reason of their damnation.

The man with whom the play opens is Garcin, a journalist and a man of letters; he says that he was executed for being a pacifist. Soon enough he is left in the room. While Estelle insists that a mistake has been made. Inez, a postal clerk, however, demands that they all stop lying and confess to their crimes, she refuses to believe that they all ended up in the room by accident and soon realize that they have been placed together in hell to make each other miserable. The man in the play named Garcin is attracted to one of the women but she happens to be a lesbian and is only attracted to the other women. The other woman, however, is not lesbian and is rather attracted to the man, who of course, does not find her attractive. Garcin asks whether there is a tooth-brush, bath-room, light; the answer is negative. There, in hell, is also not any sleep, no mirror and no windows. Garcin suggests that they try to sing about an execution and Estelle wants to find mirror. Here, Inez tries to seduce Estelle by offering to be her “mirror” and tells her everything she sees, but ends up frightening her instead.

After having argued, they decide to confess their crimes. Garcin confesses that he ill-treated his wife; Inez seduced her cousin’s wife. Estelle cheated on her husband and drowned her illegitimate baby. The door suddenly opens but he is unable to leave. He says that he will not be saved until Inez has “faith” in him. She refuses promising to make him miserable forever. Forgetting that

they all are dead, Estelle unsuccessfully tries to kill Inez, stabling her repeatedly shocked at the absurdity of his fate, thus Garcin concludes “hell is other people.”

2.4 Characters as existential agents

Garcin is the person who first arrives in the room; he is shot by a firing squad for attempting to desert during war. He seems to be the best of the three amongst the prisoners in the hell at Jail dealing with damnation. He is the person who recognizes that the three of them have been grouped together to make each other miserable and he thinks that each of them should remain silent in their respective corners. He continually tries to make peace with himself and the people he hurt during his life time. He does not question his damnation easily as recalling how awful he had been to his wife. At the end when he is given a chance to leave the room in the hell, he chooses to stay hoping to convince Inez that he is not a coward. While Inez a self-described “Damned-Bitch” is the second prisoner and also the most hostile. She has been a postal clerk and thinks that she is in hell be seducing a friend’s wife. Her lover killed both leaving the gas on them while Inez was sleeping. She said that she does not like man and instantly detests everything about Garcin. However, she finds Estelle very attractive and tries to seduce her. Estelle is the third and final character; she is also the most frightened. She desperately wants to see her reflection in a mirror and swears that she does not want to be in hell having just died of pneumonia; she says that she needs to be with a man. She eventually confesses not only to have had affairs but also drowning the baby of her lover. Garcin is momentarily drawn to her but chooses instead to focus all his energies on Inez. She tries to kill Inez forgetting that they are in hell, already dead. The character named Valet is a taciturn representative of the devil, he chats with each prisoner there in their rooms and answers their questions and promptly leaves where there is a call bell in the room but he does not always answer it and Valet says it often does not work too.

It is commonly acknowledged that existentialism is a philosophy all about the concrete individual human being. This is both its glory and shame. The philosophy of existentialism is primarily a reaction against the traditional philosophical approaches to objective and abstract understanding of human behaviour. In his play *No Exit* Jean Paul Sartre examines basic themes of existentialism through his three characters. The first subject Garcin embraces existential ideas somewhat the second character Inez seems to fully understand ideas deemed existential philosophy. Estelle is the third person and does not seem to understand these ideas well, nor does she accept them when they are first presented to her. One similarity amongst the three is that they all at same time and point seem to accept that they are in hell for a ‘reason’.

The setting of *No Exit* is thus, the perfect existentialist “Laboratory” to study three separate individuals who are divorced from the world and people they know, life in an empty room /cell, their action and feelings. This defines exactly who they really are. The lack of mirrors amplifies these situations. Each person is given a choice and they will define what they are on their own or really on other inmate to decide who they are? That is why in the play a character named Estelle who says: “Excuse me, have you a glass? [Garcin does not answer]. Any sort of glass, a pocket-mirror will do [Garcin remains silent]” (WG 18). The situation and the same reflection of the point are found in this another different interaction: “Inez: What’s the matter? Estelle: [opens her eyes and smiles]: I feel so queer. [She pats herself] don’t you ever get taken that way? When I can’t see myself, I begin to wonder if I really and truly exist...” (WG 18). In this heavy discourse, Sartre seems to develop several points and ideas, one, the individual to be decided by others surrounding his / her amongst his / her inmates, second, the person himself or herself decides what actually he is, very individually and perhaps to the point that the thing is still debatable, of being a subject and being an object, the dispute of primacy over another being conscious of the ‘self’.

Sartre examines the question of existence and essence through the action of Garcin, Inez and Estelle. Since they have all recently died, they must confront the bare existence of their physical bodies which are buried on earth. Sartre, in *No Exit* uses Descartes’ method of posing the ‘Cogito’ the individual’s consciousness and the other part of himself or herself that observes the consciousness. In the play Sartre creates a ‘menage a trois’ where each character must ignore or must accept the judgment of the other two. For that Garcin’s mouth looks grotesquely frightened. Since there are no mirrors Garcin must decide if Inez is right or what he thinks of himself is right. In this case Garcin believes Inez rather than his own judgment. He lets her define his essence or personal characteristic and thus in Sartre’s definition has ‘bad-faith’.

It is generally considered that no existential category is better known in Sartre’s philosophy than ‘bad-faith’. This is probably because as a kind of self-deception, Sartre seems to agree that our usual indication is to deny responsibilities for our situation that is to be in ‘bad-faith’. That is why Sartre in fact claims that his book *being and Nothingness* was a phenomenological study of individuals within an alienated society. Such societies foster self-deception about the structural injustices that our practices sustain.

Inspired by Kierkegaard, the existentialists distinguish despair from fear. Whereas fear has a definite object, for example one is afraid of falling off, and

in despair there is no definite concrete or abstract object. Sartre brilliantly emphasizes that hell is not so much a specific, but state of mind, by dealing the explanation of where the drawing room is, also, by using Second-Empire furniture, he makes the ides of hell not only something accessible to his contemporary French audience, but suggests that hell exists on earth. Many critics have suggested that this last point was a result of Sartre's writing during the German occupation of Paris (1940-44). The constant stair of the eyelid-fewer Valets evokes the troubling Nazi presence and their surveillance of Parisians. For someone like Sartre, who was involved in the Resistance, the looming presence of the Gestapo was a frightening possibility. It is important to remember that the play was first performed in (1944), three months before the liberation of Paris by allied forces. With humiliation and despair of German occupation for years, Sartre indubitably began to think that Paris was hell on earth.

2.5 Theatrical techniques and strange universal situations

Sartre uses the theatrical techniques of exposition to introduce each character by placing them in a strange and universal situation. Each character thus explains how they died and why they died and what do they think of their room or hell without sounding awkward. Sartre also foreshadows many of the major themes in the first section of the play. For example they are already dead and have nothing to hide, each character continues to lie to themselves, Garcin pretends to find out the furniture shocking, while Estelle pretends that their future relationship with the haunting presence of the lustful Inez looking on, Sartre, thus physically enacts the theme of triangular desire with three people 'Living' in the same room as we find saying them in the play: "Estelle: I am looking at you two and thinking that we are going to live together thinking that we are going to live together... It's so absurd!" (NE 13).

Sartre in the middle of the play emphasizes the existential theme of "self-deception" the better known theme of Sartre's existential philosophy. In the play even though they are already dead, both Garcin and Estelle do not admit of themselves why they are in hell there in this situation they have nothing to lose by admitting the truth, both are so in the habit of being dishonest with themselves, they cannot articulate even the most obvious truth. Only Inez refuses to lie calling herself a "damned-bitch" and demanding that the other two stop "play-acting". Here, Sartre's characters seem to convey the message that there is *No Exit* from "self-deception". The notion of 'self-deception' can also be understood in many ways that there are certain phases in the life of an individual to face, like the result of his or her choice and action, future, the whole phenomenon of his/her existence and even death, whatever they think

over these points, they never find a way-out except deceiving themselves. Humans are condemned to ignore the point to shift-the paradigm of thought from these points to the others they are comfortable. In order to be free, everyone ignores, deceives his/her self and to closes off the mental eyes.

2.6 Existence and essence: major themes in the play

In the play the relationship between existence and essence appears to be one of the major themes in the play. Estelle thinks that she does not really exist unless she can see herself. She does not trust her own judgment instead of relying on an external object to both create her essence and verify her existence as it was discussed earlier with another example of “bad-faith” that Estelle is unable to define her essence. Sartre believed that human consciousness was free to choose its own character of essence but must also assume responsibility for his “freedom”. One of the major components of existential philosophy, here in the play, the conversation between Inez and Estelle brings out the point:

Estelle: [indignantly]: How dare you?

Inez: Yes we are criminals, murderer...all three of us. We are in hell, my pets, they never make mistakes and people are not damned for nothing.

Estelle: Stop! For heaven’s sake.

Inez: In hell! Damned souls... that’s us, all three! (NE 16).

Thus with freedom of choice and action the responsibility also arrives with it. Sartre somewhere said that one is not responsible for himself but also for all human beings, like “in fashioning my-self I fashion man” (Heidegger). Estelle is unable to do this by asking Inez to be her mirror so she can create Estelle’s essence for her. Inez revels in her power. Even telling Estelle she has a pimple when she really does not as for Inez is concerned, she realizes to let other people define her essence. She explains that she is always painfully conscious in the following way to Estelle: “Inez: You are lucky. I am always conscious of myself in my mind. Painfully conscious” (NE 19).

One of the most founding points of Sartre’s philosophy of existentialism in the play is “existence precedes essence”, which here in the play has been shrewdly and craftily fictionalized. In my modest opinion, this play has all capacity to be called the fictional manifesto of Sartre’s philosophy in a reflection of real life phenomenon as in the play, Garcin is disclosing the secret: “Garcin: I “dreamt” you say. It was no dream, where I chose the hardest path, I made my choice deliberately. A man is what he wills himself to be.”

(NE 43). The same commentary of the existential category of “existence precedes essence” seems to be found in the conversation of both these characters like in the following conversation between Inez and Estelle:

Garcin: I died too soon. I was not allowed time... to do my deeds.

Inez: One always dies too soon... or... too late, and yet ones whole life is complete at the movement, with a line drawn neatly under it, ready for the summing-up. You are__ your life, and nothing else (NE 43).

These extract of the play seem highly philosophical as we know and discussed in the earlier chapter that we are time bound beings, in a particular period of time we project ourselves, our subject, our essence, and because what we choose and wish to be, here our choices are always at the priori, for our existence and essence. Sartre believes that it is an essential step in affirming one’s existence.

The play establishes Sartre’s underlying argument of the play: “Hell is other people”. This is the only phrase which has been the most ambiguous existential category of Sartre’s existentialism. In this phrase the word “Other”, meaning simply begins that objects which are not the self, are a construct of reflective consciousness. From an existential point of view, hell is other people because of “competitive-subjectivity”. When two people are in a single room together, they always fight over who is forced to be the object, when in the presence of the other, one’s subjectivity, agency and freedom will always be threatened simply by the other’s ‘gaze’. For Sartre, the agony of this type of objectification truly constitutes hell.

For more explanation of the phrase “Hell is other people” is that Sartre finds interpersonal bodily relations to be inherently “self-frustrating” for the following reasons: To be in the world is to have a body or to be a body. A tiny part of the world is, therefore, my own territory. In this part of the world, through my body I occupy and constitute it, it is only through existence in bodily form I can be in the world. There is the point of the existential philosophy that only concern most concrete individual of being and living or existing. The concreteness is given the prime importance. Sartre says that through the body, I perceive things and persons that make up the world. Sartre says through the body I am able to act upon me but it creates problems for the other. So for as the ‘Other’ is concerned, there are true possibilities for me, the other is body for me, the object of my vision, touch, etc., or I become a body for him and experience myself as his object. Thus, my body becomes an object of other, just as his body is an object for me. When he looks at me, I am aware

of myself as the object of his look, and I become aware of my body not as it is for me but as it is for the other. This is the sense in which I become alienated from my own, and the other becomes an equal of hell.

In the play Inez cannot be an objective mirror while looking at Estelle, since they do not have the same “taste”. Estelle surrenders her individuality to Inez’s gaze. Likewise, Inez cannot stand Garcin looking at her, because she thinks that he is automatically judging her. Since she thinks that it is her own role, she accuses him of “stealing” her face. Garcin’s mere existence thus, reduces Inez’s feelings of autonomy. He suggests that they all will accept being bound together, but Inez still insists that she has the freedom to make her own decisions. For example both Garcin and Estelle refuse to let go of their pasts, each “looking” at their friends and loved ones back on earth. As a matter of fact the characters of the play cannot escape their pasts. Like Eugene O’Neill’s *Long Day’s Journey Into Night*. Sartre’s play assembles a small group of characters into a single space and lets them tear way at each other just as with O’Neil’s, the weapon welded most often and most forcefully is the past: Inez’s homosexuality, Estelle’s lust and Garcin’s womanizing; Inez’s tolerance, Estelle’s man with a hole in his head, Garcin’s tortured wife, Inez’s cruelty, Estelle’s murder of their own baby and Garcin’s cowardice. The play itself relegated to a perpetual present, a present with no temporal markers no night and day, no sleep, but the subject of much of the dialogue is the past and more precisely what each character did to assure his or her place in hell. Even then, they realize that time is passing more quickly on earth than in their room, they both continue to see themselves in terms of their pasts. Inez, however, sees her past as meaningless and inaccessible, choosing to exist in the present instead. She insists to the other that ‘nothing’ is left of them on earth and that ‘all you own is here’, rather than justifying her existence in terms of the person she used to be. Inez asserts her freedom to choose her essence in the present even though she asserts to be one and finally the play takes a turn to its conclusion with the discussion of the characters with Garcin, he confesses the same in the play:

Garcin: ...so this is hell. I’d never have believed it you remember all we were told about the torture-chambers, the fire and brim stones. The “burning marl”, old wives tales! There is no need for red-hot hackers, “Hell is the other people” (NE 45).

Till the time, an individual is alive, he is constantly afraid of something, afraid of ‘being’ himself or herself and afraid of the “Other”, primarily which is worse than anything else but hell! The plight of facing other in life is shown by the peach of Inez in the play: [Inez to Garcin] “Inez: To forget about the

other? How utter absurd! I feel you there, in every pore. Your silence clamours in my ears. You can nail your mouth, cut your tongue out-but you can't prevent your being there" (NE 22). This conversation reveals a lot of the notions of Sartre's philosophy specially that of being scared of the other. It also points out the concept that as a man is 'condemned to be free' but only till the time man makes no choices. Whenever a choice is made the freedom comes to an end and the function of responsibility replaces the elements of freedom. When a man takes any decision to live amongst people, then also, responsibility arises towards all humanity. Man, by instinct, loves constant change in every phenomenon of life time to time, people to people, place to place, class to class, age to age etc. Sometime man tries to cut off him or herself from outside of the world and searches any place which could be called as "secluded-recesses" to him or her, but man, as a matter of fact can't help it, it is truly said that 'man is born free but everywhere in chains'. So the same happens to the characters of the play, they also try to be separated as they say:

Inez: And you Estelle? So what? Which shall it be? Which of the three of us will leave? The barriers down, why are we waiting? But what a situation! It's a scream! We are inseparable!

Estelle: Inseparable? (NE 42).

So here the situation in which they are set, they think sometime about their previous life and they compare the life of being before and being in hell they talk like this: "Inez: What would be the use ? There was some point in being "before" while still one had hope. Garcin [in a low voice]: There is no more hop... (NE 10). Even though the conditions and situations turn to the more plight full stage which appears to be worse than any precarious situation, just hell- like, and Garcin most hopelessly declares that "there is nothing to laugh about," therefore, he turns out to have the worst case of "bad-faith" of all three characters in the play. He can't decide on his own that he is not a coward, but will only believe it if Estelle says so herself, here is how their conversation goes on:

Estelle: [Gently]: Garcin

Garcin: Still there? Now listen! I want you to do me a service. No don't shrink away. I know it must seem strange to you, having someone asking you for help; you are not used to that. But if you will make the effort, if you will only will it hard enough, I dare say we can really love each other. Look at it this way. A thousand of them are proclaiming I am a coward; but what do numbers matter? If there is someone, just one person, to say quite

positively I did not run away, that I'm not that sort who runs away, that I'm brave and decent and the rest of it – well, that a person's faith would save me. Will you have that faith in me? Then I shall love you and cherish you forever. Estelle- Will you?

Estelle: [Laughing]: Oh, you dear silly man, do you think I could love a coward? (NE 39).

Even though he later says that he made his choice 'deliberately' and that a man is what he 'wills himself to be'. Garcin wearily explains that he cannot decide for himself if he is a coward or not. One says that he is a coward of his motives and that he has been unable to be honest with himself that why he ran for the border. He is also obsessed with the people who are judging him back on earth. He claims that he has left his 'fate in their hands', he says about fate:

Garcin: ...but why? Why? Finally I thought: My death will settle it. If I face death courageously, I'll prove I am no coward.

Inez: And how did you face death?

Garcin: Miserable. Rottenly [Inez laugh]...

Garcin: There they are, slumped in their chairs, sucking at their cigars. Bored they look Half-asleep. They're thinking: "Garcin's a coward". But only vaguely and dreamily. One's got to think of something. That chap Garcin was a coward". That's what they have decided, these dear friends of mine. In six months' time they'll be saying: "coward as that shrunk Garcin... (NE 38).

This classic example of 'bad-faith' stems from Garcin's complete inability to accept responsibility for his freedom to choose his own personality, Garcin surrenders his free will to other people. He becomes a 'being-in-itself' whose essence is determined by the look of the 'Other'. This is the main reason he cannot imagine existing on his own knowing that Inez will be what she is saying. Just like Estelle's inability to feel that she exists without seeing herself in a mirror. Garcin is too unable to exist without other people defining his essence from him.

In the play Garcin also looks like a prisoner of his past. He keeps listening to what people are saying about him rather than listening to his own voice in the present. Even when he attempts to convince Inez that he is not a coward, in the present, he continually justifies his action in past. For instance he suggests that he died 'too soon' and 'was not allowed time' to act, forgetting that he will be stuck in hell for one's freedom was over whelming that we are 'condemned to be free', a statement literally played out by Garcin inability to

leave the room, unlike to exist without people judging his past, Garcin condemns himself to remain in the eternal presence of the room.

However, according to the subject matter of the play, Sartre would have originally entitled the play as *The Other* because suffering from German occupation, Sartre wrote that he began to understand that evil was just an absolute and independent phenomena as good in society. But placing three individuals in the same room, Sartre not only suggests that hell naturally exists on earth but instead he believes that “Hell is the other people”. As Garcin discovers there is no need for physical torture; to gaze at the other reduces and devours his individuality. He is unable to do anything, even kiss Estelle, when Inez is watching. Ignoring his innate freedom and responsibility, Garcin thinks Inez’s judgment is the only proof of his existence.

2.7 Conclusion

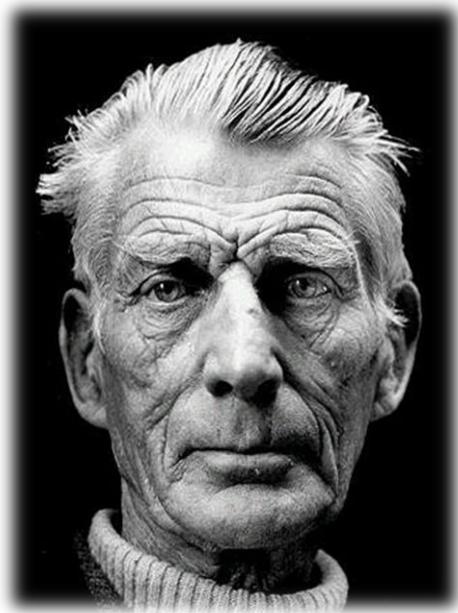
Thus Sartre seems to synthesize many of his philosophical arguments with his fiction. Yet in a play about ‘self-deception’ and ‘bad-faith’, the implicit double extender of characters ‘play-acting’ to be something they are not, and caters pretending to play those characters perfectly complements Sartre’s straight-forward philosophical arguments.

In fact *No Exit* is a play about the “devouring gaze of the other and how it restricts one’s freedom incorporates into the play itself and played out on stage through the gaze of audience members. The characters constantly look for mirror in order to avoid the judging gaze of each other, while their failure is played out by the constant state of the play’s spectators.

In the play, the central theme of freedom and responsibility comes from Sartre’s doctrine that ‘existence precedes essence’. Sartre had a belief in the human consciousness or in a ‘being-for-itself’ that differed from inanimate objects, or a ‘being-in-itself’, since humans have the ability to choose and define their individual characteristics, or essence, with his freedom of choice comes the absolute responsibility for one’s action. The fear and anxiety of this responsibility by letting other people make their choices for them, results in ‘bad-faith’. That is why Garcin is unable to leave the room when the door opens. He cannot handle the responsibility of confronting his decision to flee his country and thus leaves it upon Inez to judge him and define his essence. Similarly, Estelle does not think that she exists unless she looks in to a mirror seeing her as others do. When Inez pretends to be her mirror and says that Estelle has a pimple on her face, Estelle’s ‘bad-faith’ causes her to accept someone else literally creation as her essence. Both Estelle and Garcin are not only ‘condemned to be free’ but are willing to condemn themselves in order to avoid being free.

This emphasis on 'bad-faith' establishes Sartre's underlying argument of the play: "Hell is the other people". Using only an empty room, Sartre evokes scenes of utter torture and despair. In effect Inez cannot stand Garcin looking at her because she thinks that he is automatically judging her. Since she thinks that it is her own role, she accuses him of 'stealing' her face. Garcin's mere existence thus reduces Inez's feeling of autonomy. Moreover, both Garcin and Estelle refuse to let go of their pasts, each looking at their friends and loved ones back on earth. The attempt to justify their existence only by thinking about their past experiences: as Garcin explains his 'fate' is the evaluation of his past action by other people. Inez, however, sees her past as meaningless and inaccessibly choosing to exist in the present, instead. She insists to the other that 'nothing' is left of them on earth and that 'all you own is here'. Rather than justifying her existence in terms of the person she used to be, Inez asserts her freedom to choose her essence in the present, even though she is in hell. She is the only character in the play confronting both her responsibility and her suffering and her essential step is asserting her existence. As Sartre explained "life begins on the other side of despair".

In this way Sartre has fictionalized his philosophy in *No Exit* which draws us to the point that "existence precedes essence" which is always used to define and describe the whole phenomenon of existentialism. The play depicts the point that everyone is free and has the freedom to choose and act independently. One has the choice to create his or her own morals and values based on personal beliefs. In other words, actions are one's creator of human nature because existentialism stated that one has the choice in life. So, nothing can force one to do anything. Therefore, Sartre believes that one should take responsibility for their thoughts and then put into the action. Thus, Sartre's *No Exit* becomes the literary exploration of his existential notions, which is rightly called the "Laboratory of Existentialism".



Samuel Barclay Beckett (1906-1989)

Chapter - 3

Drama of the Absurd and the “Awful” *Waiting for Godot*

As flies to wanton boys are we to th’ gods

They kill us for their sport. (*King Lear* Act 4, scene 1, 32-37)

3.1 The author and the background of the play

Samuel Barclay Beckett (1906-1989) was an Irish-born poet, novelist and playwright. He was a brilliant student as well as an outstanding sportsman. Beckett participated in dramatics and was an avid theatre goer. Beckett became influenced by James Joyce, who had a major effect on his early literary style. For some time, he joined Trinity College as an Assistant Lecturer in French. But later he resigned from his lectureship; he wrote about it as, “I could not bear the absurdity of teaching others what I did not know myself”.

Beckett travelled around Europe, mostly Germany, gaining experience in European languages and literatures. In 1937, he made Paris his permanent home and he rightly described himself as a man whose world has no outside, he writes that “it is impossible for me to constantly working in dark”. Beckett once discovered that “I can only estimate my work from within... had a happy childhood. Although, I had a little talent for happiness. My parents did everything to make a child happy. But I was often lonely” (His biographer, Deirdre Bair).

Beckett told his friend while talking to Thomas McGreevey that “I am only interested in failure”. In 1946, he was forty and his life seemed to have been total failure. Born with remarkable gifts as an intellectual and a poet, he rejected his entire promising academic career. Harold Pinter remarked that “The farther it goes, the more good it does me. I don’t want philosophy, tracts, dogmas, creeds, way-outs, truths, answers, nothing from the bargain basement. He is the most courageous remorseless writer going”.

His first collection of short stories *More Pricks That Kicks* was promptly banned in Ireland in 1934. The reason was its “Blasphemous” reference to the Bible. In 1939 when World-War II broke-out, he was on vacation in Dublin, but he got back to France because he preferred France in war to Ireland in peace. Beckett resumed his life in Paris at the end of the war. The precarious

period of five years from 1945 to 1950 brought out a burst of inspired creative writing from him. This was the time he wrote his famous trilogy, the three novels *Molloy*, *Malice Dies*, *The Unnameable* and his “magnum opus”, the most famous play *En attendant Godot* which was translated in English as *Waiting for Godot*. This was really a rich creative period of Beckett’s life. According to John Fletcher, these works of 1940’s ask the big questions of life, question about our identities and reason for our existence. They are original in terms of their style which helps to knit together comedy and tragedy, the grotesque and sublime. Beckett’s work have become iconic, Fletcher points out that the play *waiting for Godot* has attained to the study of universal myth.

One should remember that Beckett was a consummate novelist as well, though he is better known as a dramatist. His plays are, *all that fall* 1957, *Endgame*, *One Act without words I* 1961, *Play* 1963, *Come and Go* 1966. Beckett’s plays most of the time have no setting and no action of the kind that the audience would recognize. Beckett continued to write plays till the time, almost the last years of his life. His last play was *What Where* (1984). Beckett also won the Nobel Prize for literature (?) and passed away in 1989. Beckett of course had a ‘philosophy of life’ like anyone else, but it was an intuition rather than a systematic set of belief. Beckett was a true artist and playwright. He resembles the German thinker Schopenhauer (1788-1860) whom he greatly admired. He felt that ‘will is evil and desire is the source of misery’. Beckett feels a deep kinship with such writers as Schopenhauer and shares their reputation of happy to quietist renunciation. For *waiting for godot* he says “silence is pouring onto this play like water into a sinking ship”, the characters are trifled of silence. Katherine M. Wilson says that *waiting for Godot* exactly fulfils Sartre’s definition of an existential play as one which sets out to present the contemporary situation in its full horror, so that the audience feeling it unbendable may feel forced to remedy it, in the same fashion writes A. Alvarez about Beckett:

For every one Beckett is the artist of deprivation and termed and terminal depression; he has expressed his vision of despoliation with unique power. He has pushed all the way through to the end logically, emotionally, artistically; one does not need to read every word, he has written to admire the courage and purity of his effort to identify with it and to recognize the cost.

The majority of commentators have been concerned with the religious problems offered and existential interpretation of it. One critic, for instance urges a distinction between “Nihilistic Existentialism” and “Christian

Existentialism” which asserts that the latter offers one of the essential keys to Beckett’s play but most of the themes in the play seem to favour Sartre’s interpretation. The publisher John Calder is reported to have remarked as “More books have been written on Christ, Napoleon and Wagner, in that order than anyone else, I predict that by 2000-A.D Beckett may well rank fourth if the present flood of Beckett literature keep up”.

3.2 Sartre and Camus: A comparison

According to G.S. Fraser *Waiting for Godot* “essentially is a prolonged and sustained metaphor about the nature of human life”. Alain Robbe-Grillet writing in Critique in February 1953 expressed his enthusiasm in spite of misgivings over Beckett’s “dangerous, contagious, regression”. In his book *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1961), Martin Esslin also accepts the philosophies of Sartre and Camus as being basic to *Waiting for Godot* but there is a marked difference of the form. The texture of *Waiting for Godot* with all its dramatic irregularities mirrors its ideological basics, whereas the theatre of Sartre and Camus remains formally very staid and traditional.

3.3 The reading of the play

The play has proved to be the most commercially successful experimental play. Subsequently the play has been translated into more than twenty languages. The play is so enigmatic, so exasperating and so complex and so uncompromising that the students who study the play are condemned to say that what the hell is that? While reading the play an average student is not able to understand easily.

The play won the prize of “Harold Hobson of Sunday Times” and it went on to win the “Evening Standard’s Award” for the most controversial play of the year, an award that has never been given since! The most remarkable thing about the play is its unconventional design. The play is apparently haphazard, but it is an extraordinarily powerful play in which form and meaning are skilfully blended. The major problem about the play was and is the question that “What does the play mean”? Though Beckett called the play “it is a free play of every faculty”.

First of all, let us take the original French title of the play *En attendant Godot*, which means the description implying that the play, is about what happens while waiting. It emphasizes that the play is about passing of time. The English title brings in a necessary ambiguity seeming to imply that the play is about the act of waiting itself which would necessarily problematize that, what is, who is being waited for? What is involved in the act of waiting and who is this Godot? And why should anyone wait for Godot? *Waiting for*

Godot is, therefore, quite simply a picture of antics of man as he tries to distract himself until Godot comes. But it sometimes seems that Godot is like death. He is not however seen as death because man flatters himself with groundless hopes. Thus, Godot becomes anything, the expectation of which helps man to bear his existence, or as Estragon puts it “We always find something, eh Didi, to give us the impression we exist?”

Many of the critics of the play have called it ‘a religious allegory’. One evening on a lonely country road, near a tree, two elderly men half tram, half-clown keep waiting for someone named Godot who they hope will do something for them eventually. The two men in the play Estragon “Gogo” and Vladimir “Didi” are not sure what exactly Godot will do for them. They occupy the time the best they can, until the arrival there of Pozzo, a local landowner, on his way to the fair to sit his slave Lucky. Pozzo halts a while with Estragon and Vladimir. The three become so agitated by Lucky’s intellectual performance that they all set upon him and silence him. Soon Pozzo takes his leave driving Lucky before him. Estragon and Vladimir have not been alone, many movements together before a small boy appears with the news that “Mr. Godot won’t come this evening but surely tomorrow”. The boy departs, night falls abruptly; and after briefly contemplating suicide by hanging themselves from the tree, the two men decide to leave, but despite their decision to go, do not move as the curtain falls.

The curtain rises the next day on a scene identical except for the fact that the tree has put forth a few leaves. Vladimir is much the same things happen from when Pozzo and Lucky appear from the side they made their exit in act 1, Pozzo happens to have gone blind and Lucky dumb. All four collapse on top of one another and then somehow manage to get-up again. Pozzo becomes exasperated at Vladimir’s questions about time, saying furiously that life itself is only a brief instant. Pozzo leaves driving, Lucky before him, from the side he had entered in Act 1. After another brief interval the boy comes again and delivers the moon rises abruptly. The two men again contemplate suicide; and then despite their agreement to leave make no movement as the curtain falls. So, this way ends the play in which as a critic says wittily about it “nothing happens twice”.

3.4 Vladimir and estragon’s relationship in the play

Vladimir and Estragon are seemingly old chums who have been together for many years and they have not only grown to be dependent on each other, but also grown to be almost on each other, but also grown to be almost like each other. An American writer Norman Mailer once described, “Vladimir

and Estragon as an old homosexual couple”, (Village Voice, 7 may 1956) and said that the play was about impotence. While you may dismiss this as silly, many critics have talked of the ‘semi-conjugal’ nature of the relationship between Estragon and Vladimir”, some critics have said that Vladimir is the soul and Estragon is the body, Vladimir is obsessed with his hat and Estragon with his boots; that Vladimir has stinking breath and Estragon stinking feet. Vladimir has trouble with his prostate and is, therefore, always restless, while Estragon falls asleep all the time, and Estragon screams while Vladimir hates listening to them. It has often been said that Vladimir is the more intellectual of the two, but it is Estragon who claims to have been a poet and he does quote Shelley’s “To the Moon”. Vladimir looks after Estragon in almost a maternal / wifely manner, feeding him covering him with his coat and singing a lullaby to oust him to sleep. Vladimir is the one with the hopes; Estragon is the one with complaints and the sulks and also is more aggressive. They constantly bicker with each other like a couple of long standing, husband- wife, mother-child, or just as old friends. Vladimir and Estragon are different from each other but you cannot think of one without thinking of the other; they need each other to play but their various roles, for they are their roles as in everyone.

3.5 Relationship between Pozzo and lucky

The pair of Pozzo and Lucky seems to be more sharply differentiated than Vladimir and Estragon. Pozzo is so obviously the master and Lucky, the slave. After all Lucky’s famous speech is that: “We are only certain of death in this indifferent universe” (?). Pozzo is almost a god- substitute, one who gives Lucky’s sense of purpose, a place in the world order. Pozzo seems at least in the first act to be almost Godot, the powerful lord who can decide the fate of all underlings, the Saviour that the tramps are waiting for however what can be said with certainty is that Pozzo’s relationship with Lucky too, is a symbolic relationship, the one needing the other to give pulpous to their lives.

3.6 Who is godot?

During the course of the play, certain unanswered question arise like, who is Godot? Who are Gogo and Didi? Who beats Gogo? Where do we come from? Where do we go to? Who is responsible of our suffering, the suffering which we are given already since we exist? These are the major questions of existential concern in the play we face when we read it. Various critics have offered multiple interpretations. Eva Metman describes Godot as ‘A distant mirage’, Metman further remarks about Godot:

Godot has several traits in common with the image of God as we know it from the old and New Testament. He might well be meant as a cynical

comment on the “Second-Coming of Christ” while his doing nothing might be an equally cynical reflection concerning man’s forlorn state. This feature, together with Beckett’s statement about something being believed to be “in store for us not in store in us”, seems to show clearly that Beckett’s points to the sterility of a consciousness that expects and wait for the old activity of god or gods... Godot is explicitly vague, merely an empty promise, corresponding to the Luke-warm piety and absence of suffering in the tramps. Waiting for him has become a habit which Beckett calls a guarantee of dull inviolability... and adaptation to the meaninglessness of life.

We are told that he has a white beard (probably), has at least two servants, one who looks after his goats and one who looks after his sleep. He beats one, but not the other. This inability of their illustration to an audience that the idea of Mr. Godot is irrelevant and unknown that is what constitutes in man the element of angst. The essence of Existentialism concentrates on the concept of the individual’s freedom of choice as opposed to the belief that humans are controlled by a pre-existing component being, such as god. The play essentially is cantered around these two men only Vladimir and Pozzo. Both wait for Mr. Godot of whom they know very little. Estragon admits himself that he may never recognize Mr. Godot. Estragon says: “Personally I would not know him if I ever see him”. Estragon also remarks “we hardly know him” (WG 21). Estragon and Vladimir have made the choice of waiting as they talk “Estragon: Let’s go. Vladimir: We can’t Estragon: Why not? Vladimir: We are waiting for Godot” (WG 21).

3.7 Major themes of the play

Beckett looks like to be lightly influenced by French existentialist Sartre and Camus. As it was discussed earlier that the philosophy of existentialism where human beings simply exist in a universe that does not have any overarching moral order or meaning. We are not essentially good or bad but we are what we make ourselves and we are what we chose to believe and act.

Primarily the play *En attendant Godot* is a social, political, psychological and theological interpretation of the human condition, the complete human being. Beckett seems to be highly influenced by the shattered, precarious and frustrated and the man when he was lost there in blood- shed of wars, the massacre of the innocents by bombing, the torture of patriots, the lynching of collaborators, the ravishing of women, the ignominy of starvation, the collapse of morals and morale. He must choose for himself his course of action, and in doing so, he automatically chooses for everyone. He is not given the choice of inaction in an existentialist world man is committed, where he wants to be or not.

Generally, Existentialism repudiates the idea of religion in bringing meaning to life, and advocates the idea that individuals are instrumental in creating meaning in their lives. *Waiting for Godot* shows that the individual must take action instead of just sitting around waiting for Godot that may or may not bring salvation.

The Existentialism about which we find some implication in *Waiting for Godot* resembles the theistic Existentialism. Here in the play we find that all humanity is waiting their lives due to inaction and waiting for salvation of a deity. When that divine being may or may not even exist. The existential argument is that humans must break the habit of expecting salvation and take to bring meaning into their lives and time as free men Vladimir says: "Habit is a great deadener". A major point which is there in the play is complete "inaction." The whole phenomenon of inaction in the play defer to the philosophy of Sartre's existentialism of action where there is no one to save man accept him and his action.

The very first words of the play are "nothing to be done". has been repeatedly used three times in the play. Vladimir says: "there is nothing, nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes its awful" many times Estragon says, "lets-go" but Vladimir always reminds him that they cannot as they are 'Waiting for Godot'. Instead of acting, they can only wait for someone or something to act-upon them. There are various Christian illusions given in the play, the very minute points of Christianity which resemble the play very much to Christian existentialism or what people call as the Theistic existentialism.

In the entire play Estragon and Vladimir never refer to each as Estragon or Vladimir but rather as Gogo and Didi. Vladimir is also referred to as Albert. Both of them are indistinguishable and seem to represent all humanity as Vladimir says later says "all mankind is us", which draw our attention to the Heidegger's "in fashioning myself I fashion man." In the second act Pozzo becomes all humanity.

In the play Estragon is more mundane character of the two, while Vladimir is the more intellectual character. For the carrot, the more Estragon eats the worse it gets, whereas for Vladimir the more he eats the better it tastes. This distinguishes the two and there is "nothing you can do about it" as "one is what one is" since the essential does not change. The struggle of life is shown in an extremely existential way as it is useless fight in the struggle of life; because the out-come of life will always remain the same as death.

Albert Camus pondered on the enigma of the shattered and frustrated mentality of his time, which as the result of one of the most precarious condition of man in human history, to commit suicide to get free from all bondages of living and being or existing, to get free from body, to get free from all worldly, mental problems. Here in the play Estragon and Vladimir both ponder and think over it to get free from all the things, the exile, the limit and the world, etc. Here while talking about suicide Vladimir and Estragon decide not to commit suicide and one of them says: “do anything, it’s referring”. The same thing we find saying Camus in the preface of his *Myth of Sisyphus* (1942):

The fundamental subject of the myth of Sisyphus is that it is legitimate and necessary to wonder whether life has a meaning; therefore, it is legitimate to meet the problem of suicide face to face... in 1940 amidst the French and European disaster, this book declares that ever within the limits of nihilism it is possible to find the means to proceed beyond nihilism... The myth of Sisyphus poses mortal problems; it sums itself up for me as a lucid invitation to live and to create, in every midst of the desert (*MS?*).

The play also propagates that human relationships are existential. Pozzo and Lucky are master and slave. Pozzo who seeks friendship from Estragon and Vladimir ends up forming a meaningless friendship with them much like his meaning. The relationship with Lucky dehumanizes both of them. The friendship between Vladimir and Estragon seems to overcome the existential dilemma when Vladimir wakes-up Estragon because he “felt lonely”.

Albert Camus believed that the boredom of waiting, which was essentially the break-down of routine or habit, caused people to think seriously about their identity as Estragon and Vladimir do. Waiting in the play induces boredom as the theme. Ironically Beckett attempts to create a similar nuance of boredom within the audience by the mundane repetition of dialogue and action. Both characters, Estragon and Vladimir constantly ponder and ask questions, many of which are rhetorical or are left unanswered.

The German Existentialist Martin Heidegger expressed clearly that human beings can hope to understand why they are here in this universe. The tramp’s repetitive inspection of their empty hats perhaps symbolizes mankind vain search for answers within the vacuum of universe. Jean Paul Sartre declared that human beings require a rational basis for their lives, but are unable to achieve one. Estragon and Vladimir attempt to put order in their lives by waiting for Godot who never arrives. They continually subside into the futility of their situation, reiterating the phrase “nothing to be done”.

Beckett in *Waiting for Godot* conveys a universal message that pondering over the impossible questions that are from waiting, cause pain, anxiety, inactivity and destroy people from within. We note that both Estragon and Vladimir ponder on suicide for some time by hanging themselves from the tree, but are unable to do through fear and anxiety. Beckett's characters are aware of different choices they can make but are hesitant, anxious, and generally inactive as it is shown at end of the act one when they decide to leave but are immobile: "Estragon: Well shall we go? Vladimir: Yes, let's go. They do not move" (WG 52). Beckett explains that humans pass time by habit or routine to cope with the existentialist dilemma of the dread or anxiety of their existence. Beckett believes that humans basically elevate the pain of living or being. Beckett's bitterness towards time is illustrated by Pozzo's bleak speech:

Suddenly furious have you not done tormenting me with your accursed time! ...one day I went blind... one day we were born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same, second, the light gleams an instant, then its night once more (WG 87).

In the play the two tramps are living at the barest level of existence. The situation of Lucky is quite pathetic, especially in view of his glorious past as Pozzo describes in his speech tells us that in his sonar movements Lucky must have brooded deeply over the anguish of human. The situation in *Waiting for Godot* at once turns into tragedy when the audience thinks about the helplessness of tramps. The total effect of co-mingling of tragic and comic suggests that he looks at life from a position of pessimist and optimist. The form of tragedy and comedy is highly suitable to his vision of life.

Beckett is also considered to be one of the most important figures of the "French Absurdist". According to Martin Esslin, he is the first founder of "Absurdist Theatre." *Waiting for Godot* is one of the master pieces of Absurdist literature. Elements of absurdity for making this play are so engaging and lively that Beckett seems to combat the traditional notion of time. It attacks the two main ingredients of the traditional views of time, "habit" and "memory". The word absurd means nonsensical opposed to reason, something silly, foolish, senseless, ridiculous and topsy-turvy or "out of harmony etc. Moreover a play having loosely constructed plot, unrecognizable character, metaphysically called Absurd play. Actually "The Absurdist Theatre" believes that the plight of human life is purposeless in an existence which is out of harmony with its surroundings. However, what makes the play absurdist is its ending. We note that the ending of the play is not a conclusion in the usual sense. The 'Wait' continues; the human contacts remain unsolved; the problem of existence remains meaningless, futile and purposeless.

One of the approaches to *Waiting for Godot* is regarded it as a religious play because there are ample references to Godot as God or Christ for hope of salutation. The two tramps are waiting for Godot who is variously interpreted by critics. There is a hope that one day Godot will come and they will be saved. The play in itself has a universal appeal. The tramps represent all humanity. Their suffering and all torments are the torment and suffering of all human beings. They reflect modern man's consciousness and loneliness, absurdity, forgetfulness and illusion, deferred hope, meaninglessness, inaction, physical suffering, mental Anguish, death, despair and isolation.

Thus, we find ample implication in the play *waiting for Godot*, a clear text of Christian Existentialism. For Christian Existentialism, religion and God are dominant and the Supreme One is in the centre for each phenomenon of the universe, whereas in Atheistic Existentialism is based on the world without God and there is no at all divine being. One is God centred the other man centred. Heidegger says "man alone is in a Godless universe." The comparative study of both philosophies helps us to prove *Waiting for Godot* can be considered as a Christian Existentialist play. Man is confronting the problems of his existence as a being; he is striving for his survival and to control the bridle of the facing time. He is struggling and striving to save his individuality. These ideas lead us towards existential philosophy. The play has all the traits of existentialism, both Vladimir and Estragon represent "man" in general who are facing problems of their own existence.

Waiting for Godot as a display of Beckett's bleak view of life would be a simplistic presumption as Estragon and Vladimir epitomize all human being, as Estragon refers to himself as "Adam" showing the full range of human emotion. Estragon and Vladimir do suffer but equally show glimpse of happiness and excitement. They are excited by Pozzo's arrival and Estragon is "highly excited" about the prospect of a creation. There appear to be two things positive and negative. The pessimistic view is that they cannot escape waiting for "Godot" from each other or from their situation in general. The optimistic view of the play shows the range of human emotion and the need to share experiences alongside the suffering of finite existences governed by past acting in the present and uncertain of the future. All characters are engaged in a search for meaning. The search is doomed to failure because they are not sure what they are searching for. The second aspect of the metaphysical concern is that search for self-knowledge. They take the interior journey. 'Self' in Beckett is something indefinable in space, something dimensionless, but something we can call consciousness, something which exists outside the word space and time and is by definition unattainable with the world, it is like

the centre of circle which exists but we cannot attain. An attempt to circumscribe it merely creates a new circumference which itself has a new and equally unattainable centre. Life as the pursuit of self becomes the endless, hopeless task of pursuing an infinitely receding something. It has the characteristics of nothing. Beckett believes in a principle of inner life. One may call it essence, self, personality or soul- for whose autonomous existence, there is not shred of evidence beyond our belief in it. Life is an exile from that attainable self. It is an exile from attainable self. It is also a pursuit of self. It goes on beyond death. One can only move nearer to the unattainable essence. For although unattainable, it is not unapproachable, we can get close to ourselves.

3.8 Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that the hope for salvation may also be an evasion of suffering, and anguish that springs from facing the reality of man's condition. Eric Bentley rightly said about the play *waiting for Godot*, "it is a play containing summary of existential thought, it could have been rewritten by Sartre." Beckett mostly of the times seems to be busy with Christian Existentialism, religious thought to the maxims intent. Beckett's creative intuition bears a close parallel to Sartre's existentialist philosophy. For Beckett as well as Sartre an existential man must face the human conditions. He must find the root of nothingness dispensing on his over he must create him in succession of choice. Godot is obviously the image of what Sartre calls 'bad-faith'.

People have described *Waiting for Godot* from various point of views, a critic says about the play is a statement in dramatic terms of the wretchedness of man without God; while another critic sees it as a "general expression of the futility of human existence when man points his hope on a force outside of himself." Both these interpretations, the first by a devout Roman Catholic, and other by a firm existentialist are equally valid and equally irrelevant since Beckett is not concerned with any religious or philosophical belief as he said: "I am not interested in any system". (?) Thus, *Waiting for Godot* of Beckett can be said to be a study of man, the man 'lost'; his helplessness, meaninglessness, despair, anguish, his exile, frustration and all of which he makes us experience directly.

Conclusion

Chapter - 4

Conclusion

4.1 The horrors of the wars

The breakdown of culture and tradition in the twentieth century is very clearly reflected in both the plays, *waiting for Godot* and *No Exit*. After surviving two world wars the tradition of the West had been shattered as was never before which changed the cultural, social, emotional, literal, philosophical and political system of the West. The picture of horrible situations discussed by Sartre, with the personal and emotional perception of his character, has been expressed in the following way:

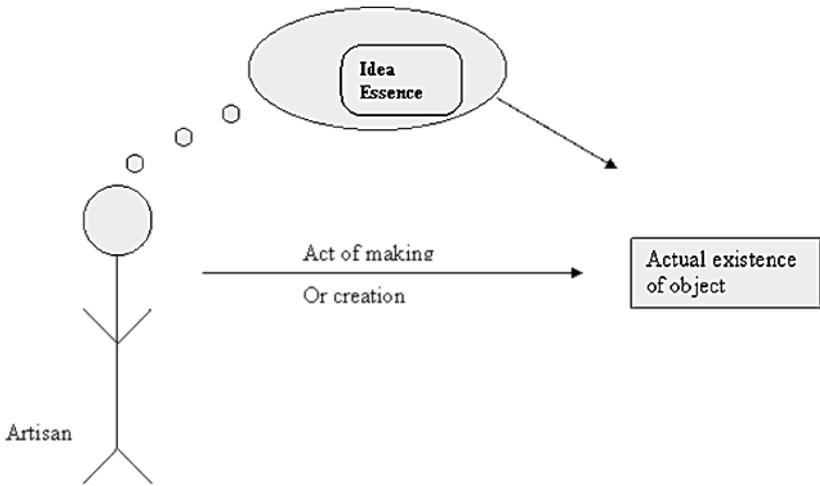
Garcin: Let that be. It's always side issue I am here because I treated my wife abominably. That all for five years.... She is suffering still. There she is: the moment I mention her I see her... for five years their! They have given her back my things; she is sitting by the window, with my coat on her knees. The coat with the twelve bullet holes. The bloods like rust, a brown ring round each hole. It's quite a museum piece; that coat, scarred with history. And I used to wear it, fancy! Now can't you shed a tear, my love! Surely you will squeeze one at last? No? You can't manage it? Night after night I came home blind drunk, stinking of wine and woman. She'd sat up for me of course. But she never cried, never uttered a word of reproach. Only her eyes spoke. Big, tragic eyes... It's snowing in the street won't you cry, confound you? The women were born martyred..." (NE 24).

The Holocaust showed the atrocities of war and human nature. The effect of political reforms such as Communism, Marxism and Scientific temper had obliterated and declared "the death of god" and it was felt that religion no longer offered a suitable reason for living. Thus we can say that Beckett's pessimism is understandable with a couple of reasons. He lived through two world wars, fighting the world war for the French resistance against the Nazis. He would have witnessed the atrocities of human nature, chaos, suffering, angst, despair, pointlessness, meaninglessness, violence and the breakdown of communication. He would inevitably have spent time during the war

helplessly waiting for something. In *Waiting for Godot* Barclay Beckett portrays the human condition as a period of suffering. Heidegger theorizes the same as “humans are thrown into the world” and that suffering is a part of human existence, as someone says about it the “sin of being born”. Bryan Magee writes in his *Story of Philosophy* “the individual finds his own identity as a problem, and hopes to uncover meaning in it, in life, through investigating the mystery of his own existence” (SP 208).

When existentialism was popular, what Sartre did was to contrast a divine view point on the world and on human nature with a human viewpoint where there is no divine element. Thus, when God thought about creating the world, he conceived it first... he had in mind what the world was going to be and what human nature was going to be. There were the “essences” of the world and humanity, the things that will make them what they are. Then God created everything and gave existences to all essences. So to God, “essence precedes existence”. Now Sartre did not believe in God, so there was no place for the essence of humanity to be before existence. For Sartre, existence comes first and the essence comes late. Indeed, the essence is whatever we decide it is going to be, therefore, Sartre declares that “existence precedes essence”. Sartre says that what all existentialist, both atheist and Christian, share in common “is that they think that existence precedes essence, or, if you refer, that subjectivity must be the starting point” (EHE 3). Sartre uses the example of a paper cutter to explain how the old view treated human beings artifacts, whose nature tied to a preconceived essence and to a project outside of them, rather than as absolute individuals, Sartre writes in *Existentialism and Human Emotion*:

Let us consider an object that is manufactured, for example, a booth or paper cutter, here has been an object which has been made by an artisan whose inspiration comes from a concept. He referred to the concept of what paper cutter is... Thus the paper cutter is at once an object produced in a certain way and, on the other hand, one being a specific use... Therefore, let us say that, for the paper cutter, essence precedes existence (14).

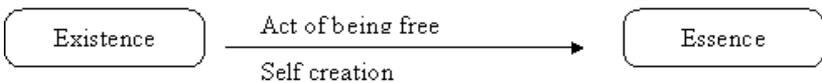


Of Course, the artisan in our case is god. Sartre continues

When we conceive of God as the creator, he is generally thought of as a superior sort of artisan... Thus the concept of man in the mind of God is comparable to the concept of the paper cutter in the mind of the manufacture... Thus, the individual man is the realization of a certain concept in the divine intelligence (*EHE* 14).

Here Sartre seems to be attacking that we get our nature from outside of us, from a Being that created us with a preconceived idea of what we were to be and what we were to be good for. Our happiness and our fulfillment consist in our living up to the external standards that God had in mind in creating us both our nature and our value come from outside of us, according to Sartre:

What is meant here by saying existence precedes essence? It means that first of all, man exists, turns-up, appears on the scene, and only afterwards, defines himself... Not only is man what he conceives himself to be, but he is also only what he wills himself to be after this thrust toward existence. Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself (*EHE* 15).



The most important thing, therefore, for Sartre is not so much the distinction between essence and existence but the absence of God. For Sartre, the absence of God has a much larger significance than the metaphysics of creations, without God there is no purpose, no value, and no meaning in the world. That is the foundational proposition for 'Existentialism'. A world

without purpose, value, or meaning is literally senseless, worthless, meaning less, empty, and hopeless. Similarly Albert Camus has also tried to diagnose the human situation in a world of shattered belief in his long essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*:

A world that can be explained by reasoning however faulty is a familiar world. But in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile, because he is an irremediable exile, because he is deprived of memories of a lost homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitute the feeling of Absurdity (MS 10).

It was Martin Esslin who coined the term 'absurd' for the first time in his epoch-making critical book *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1961):

Absurd originally means, out of harmony, in a musical context. Hence its dictionary definition: out of harmony with reason or propriety, incongruous, unreasonable and illogical. In common usage, absurd, may simply mean 'ridiculous', but this is not the sense in which Camus uses the word... in an essay on Kafka, Ionesco defined his understanding of the term as follow: 'Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose... cut off from his religious metaphysical and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his action became causeless, absurd, useless; this sense of metaphysical anguish at the absurdity of the human condition is broadly speaking, the theme of plays of Beckett... A similar sense of senselessness of life of inevitable devaluation of ideals, purity, and purpose, is also the theme of much of the work of dramatist like Giraudoux, Anouilh, Salacious, Sartre and Camus himself (TA 24).

Albert Camus has also portrayed the starkness and hopelessness of this problem of existence and meaninglessness. Another great text of French Existentialism, *The Myth of Sisyphus* represents the similar idea, subject matter, and content as Beckett and Sartre. In Greek Mythology, Sisyphus had once designed the goals and cheated death, was condemned for eternity to roll a stone up to a hill. Every time he was about to complete his task, the stone would roll back down to the bottom of the hill. Sisyphus would then have to start over again, even though the same would happen again. Thus the punishment of Sisyphus is a punishment just because it is an endless exercise in futility. Sisyphus is stuck in an eternally pointless task. If the world and everything in it is also pointless, the lesson would be that the task of Sisyphus is identical to everything that we will ever be doing in life. We as human beings and individuals are no different from Sisyphus, and if his punishment makes the afterlife a hell for him, we are already living in the hell.

Presumably, Sisyphus is unable to escape his condition through suicide. So if we can, then why not? Because he too exists as he chooses to continue his task not taking any headache why all is happening, without questioning anything he is brave enough to stand alive. But suicide is not the typical existentialist answer. What can Sisyphus do to make his life endurable? Well he can't just decide that it is meaningful. The value and the purpose that objectively don't exist in the world can be restored by an act of will. Again this is what has struck people as liberating about existentialism, to live one's life just going along with conventional values and forgetting about the absurdity of the world is not authentic. Authenticity is to exercise one's free will and to choose the activities and goals that will be meaningful for one's self. With this approach even Sisyphus can be engaged and satisfied with what he is doing.

4.2 Nihilism and existentialism

Now we can answer the question that why "Hell is other people". If we live our lives just because of the completely free and autonomous decisions that we make, this creates nothing that is common to others. If we adopt something that comes from someone else, this could give us a common basis to make a connection. Since Nietzsche did not believe that there was God as he declared "God is dead", this expresses his view that the effective belief in God was dead but he has a bit of fun with the metaphor of dying, decay etc. Sartre is a bit clearer that this is a catastrophe, since it means nothing. "NIHILISM" is the condition of not believing in anything to live for. Life cannot be lived like this and it is intolerable, therefore, if existentialism in general is more profound than the thoughtless souls who think that an absurd world is fun. So for I have been considering Atheistic Existentialists with Sartre and Nietzsche and the way they formulate their doctrines, the nasty and contemptuous philosophy, it might seem that atheism would be intrinsic to existentialist ideas.

The absence of God implies the loss of values, however, that is not quite right, and as we continue into existentialism before their time, we cannot avoid encountering such a one, one of the earliest, who also happens to be a Theistic Existentialist. Thus in a sense existentialism begins as a form of theism and later appears in atheistic form.

In the theistic existentialist, Søren Kierkegaard accepts, as fully as Sartre or Camus, the absurdity of the world. But he does not postulate about the non-existence of God, with the principle that nothing is in the world, nothing available to sense or reason provides any knowledge or reason to believe in

God. While traditional Christian theologians, like Thomas Aquinas, saw the world as providing evidence of God's existence and also thought that rational arguments a priori could establish the existence of God; Kierkegaard does not think that this is the case. But Kierkegaard's conclusion about this could just as easily be divided from Sartre's premises. After all if the world is absurd and everything we do is absurd anyway, why not do the most absurd thing imaginable? And what could be more absurd than to believe in God? So why not...? The atheists don't have any reason to believe in anything else, or really even to believe in anything else or really even to disbelieve in that, so we may as well go for it.

4.3 *No exit and waiting for godot: A comparison*

The decline of religious faith was masked until the end of the Second World War by the substitute religious faith in progressive nationalism, and various totalitarian fallacies. All this was shattered by the war. The play *waiting for godot* does not tell a story, it explores a static situation as "nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes. It's awful". The play essentially concerned with conveying the author's sense of mystery bewilderment and anxiety when confronted with the human condition and his despair at being unable to find a meaning in existence. In *waiting for godot*, the feeling of uncertainty produces the ebb and flow of this uncertainty from the hope of discovering the identity of Godot to its repeated disappointment are themselves the essence of the play.

Whether Godot is meant to suggest the intervention of a supernatural and mythical human being whose arrival is expected to change the situation or both these possibilities combined, his exact nature is of secondary importance. The subject of the play is not Godot but waiting, the act of waiting. The act of waiting is an essential and characteristic aspect of human condition. Waiting is to experience the action of time which is constant change. Thus nothing real ever happens; the change is in itself an illusion. The ceaseless activity of time is self-defeating purposeless and there for null and void. The more things change the more they are the same. That is the terrible stability of the world.

In *No Exit* and *Waiting for Godot*, a common philosophy has been used to construct the main characters. The form of thinking in both is the philosophy of existentialism with a slight difference in the theistic existentialism in *Waiting for Godot* and atheistic existentialism in *No Exit*. The characters of both the plays show the existential beliefs. The play *waiting for Godot* and *No Exit* both existential pieces of literature are based on two different contents. Both plays widely display the existential idea through their main characters.

Sartre's philosophy offers to be a form of humanism which can be defined as a responsibility of every man to act in the best interest for the greater good of the whole. This goal is a test of humanity that each character in both *No Exit* and *Waiting for Godot* fails at the accomplishing. These failures, however, stand to act as a resounding warning from Sartre. Finally, the premise of existentialism by definition says that because man was created without a specific intent, the universe is, thus, indifferent to human existence. Because of this indifference, the human journey through life is controlled by a dichotomized relationship between struggle and persistence. The various faceted arguments of Sartre's versions are conceivably explored and weaved throughout the characters in *No Exist* and *Waiting for Godot*. Beyond its function, as a comical metaphor, is to end a conceivably awkward state of affairs. In *No Exit*, Sartre uses paper-knife to concisely demonstrate the nature of his theory. The purpose of a paper-knife was decided before its existence. If there are no envelopes to be opened or pages to be separated, the paper-knife lack functionality; and thus, the physical existence of this object cannot subsist without its essence. Sartre says that this is untrue of a man. There is no pre-conceived plan or purpose for human life and we, unlike trees or rocks, lack a function by the definition of the "Choice". Humans do not all act the same; we vary in emotional responses, career preferences, physical attractions and physical appearances. These factors essentially are formed from our acknowledgement of our consciousness and employment of choice based free will. In his book *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre defines subjects, 'those have the capability to formally recognize and address consciousness, and objects-which lack said ability-as two types of "beings"; "a being-for-itself" and "a being-in-itself". Humans function as a "being-for-itself" by the temperament of free will but remain to be incomplete due to their lack of definitive purpose, the means in which we define *Waiting for Godot* and *No Exit* as the term existentialism.

Sartre argues that although we are ultimately in charge of defining our essence, this right is compromised when in the company of other "being-for-itself". Humans become influenced by the presence of another in such a manner they immediately become aware of all gestures, and expression, acts and conducts. This "gaze" of another compromises an individual's notion of inherent freedom by unavoidably becoming objectified by that person or persons, for better or for worse Pozzo in *Waiting for Godot* arguably utilizes this power of the "Other" by leading around Lucky on a rope. He puts himself in a perception of power by exhibiting his control over another human being; and thus any other person who views him will automatically have a tainted view of his definitive essence. He essentially molds the perception of the

“other” before the viewer even realizes that they are watching him. The case of Vladimir and Estragon, however, differ greatly from that of Garcin, Estelle, Inez, Pozzo and Lucky. The way a reader gathers background information can happen in a myriad of ways; through plot progress, character development and so forth.

We find that these two great writers of their ages Samuel Barclay Beckett and Jean Paul Sartre differ in some ways; one belongs very clearly to existential theatre and the other to the “Theatre of Absurd” as Esslin concludes. Even though, their content and subject matter are almost same, yet these writers differ from each other, as they are labeled. The dramatist of absurd in an important respect, they present their sense of the irrationality of the human condition in the form of highly lucid and logically constructed reassuring. While the “Theatre of the Absurd” to which Beckett belongs, strives to express its sense of the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the open abandonment of the rational devices and discursive thought. While Sartre and Camus express the new content in the old convention, Beckett goes a step further in trying to achieve a unity between its basic exemption and the form in which these are expressed. In some senses, the way of Sartre is less adequate as an expression of the philosophy of Sartre in artistic expression, as distinct from philosophic terms.

In response to these two texts *Waiting for Godot* and *No Exit* which project the mid-20th century crises of Europe and tell us the tale of man’s tragedy, the tragedy of emotional, mental, physical intellectual political, social, cultural traditional, religious and economical loss; all human and existential concerns and what not! Both plays are representative and reflective of all these things. This is what allows master pieces to live on in a changing global community. It is hard to say when or whether these works will become obsolete, but it is certain that if these two plays do so, it will be in centuries to come. And now I would like to sum-up this discourse with Martin Esslin’s justification. Esslin writes about the Theater of the Absurd in the following manner:

This is an inner contradiction that the dramatists of the Absurd are trying by instinct and intuition rather than by conscious effort, to over-come and resolve.... This is the difference between the approach of the philosopher and that of poet... the difference between theory and experience.

It is this striving for integration between the subject-matter and the form in which it is expressed that separates the Theatre of the Absurd from the Existentialist Theatre (TA 25).

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