

EXISTENTIALISM HAS INDEED A STRONG UNDERTONE OF POSITIVISM: THE REALITY HAS THE LAST WORD (HERBERT MARCUSE)

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Abstract

*This study will hopefully open new doors in the sphere of existentialism, as the paper explores a new outlook, a new dimension in the form of optimism, which has long been neglected or given very little attention. Moreover, the analysis of the literary text will also pave the way for the upcoming readers to view the existentialist texts in a brighter light. The research design is Qualitative and data analysis is done through the Interpretive approach¹. This paper is divided into two broad sections; the first section is aimed at in depth analysis of the relationship between the theories of existentialism and positivism in the light of views held by major existentialists. The second section focuses on Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* to find out the elements of positivism in an Existentialist play², thereby emphasizing the fact that every existentialist text indeed has a strong undertone of positivism.*

Introduction

It can be claimed with impunity that Existentialism has existed ever since human beings were created. It has to do with human existence and the various aspects of human life. However, as a philosophy its origin can be traced back to German philosopher Albert Camus, though, Jean Paul Sartre is considered as the father of Existentialism. Existentialism “denies that the universe has any intrinsic meaning or purpose, individuals must assume ultimate responsibility for their acts of free will, with/without certain

¹ The interpretive method of research is based on the premise that our knowledge of reality, including the sphere of human action, is a social construction by human actors and that this applies in an equal measure to the field of research. Therefore, there is no objective reality which can be uncovered by researchers. See N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (eds.), *Hand Book of Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994).

² Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (New York: Grove Press, 1987).

knowledge... and must shape their own destinies”³. Positivism, on the other hand, is the theory that knowledge can be acquired only through direct observation and experimentation and not through metaphysics or theology⁴. Thus, it appears that the two are completely opposite. Existentialism implies utter disbelief in the existence of the universe and the associated phenomena therefore it represents despair and hopelessness. In contrast, positivism means being positive towards everything. This paper aims to explore the strange relationship between the philosophies of Existentialism and Positivism, in the light of the views held by major existentialists, thereby proving that though the two appear to be on opposite poles, the undercurrent of Existentialism has a strong element of positivism and the two are indispensable to each other. The purpose of this inquiry is not only to establish that there is a nexus between Positivism and Existentialism, but also to further the idea by proposing a concrete example in the form of a literary work *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett. This work makes an effort to convey the idea, which is the core aim of this paper.

Literature review

Critics have analyzed the philosophy of Existentialism in different paradigms, but those who explicitly address the problematic relation between Existentialism and Positivism are few in number. Herbert Marcuse is one of them. In his article “Existentialism: Remarks on Jean Paul Sartre’s L’ETRE ET LE NEANT” he adroitly discusses the reasons for the evolution of the Existentialist theory, thus conveying the idea that though Existentialism has evolved and gained ascendancy in an atmosphere of despair, it conveys a strong sense of positivism, in which “reality has the last word”⁵.

Another writer of striking interest is Henri Peyre. In his article “Existentialism: A Literature of Despair?” he upholds the same idea, and

³ Quoted in Robert T. Fertig, *A Guide to Universal Truths* (Fertig’s Christian Trust, 2008), 67.

⁴ The logical positivists argue that all genuine propositions are either analytic or verifiable by experience. See John Shand, *Philosophy and Philosophers: An Introduction to Western Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2002), 242.

⁵ Herbert Marcuse. “Existentialism: Remarks on Jean Paul Sartre’s L’ETRE ET LE NEANT,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (March 1948).

concludes with an air of optimism by stating, “for beyond it a vista of unlimited hope extends”⁶.

Frederick Copleston also presents an analytical and comparative discussion on the relationship between Existentialism and Positivism in his book *Contemporary Philosophy: Studies of Logical Positivism and Existentialism*⁷. David Smith, Inogen Carter and Ally Carnwath in their respective articles have emphasized on the notion of positivism enveloped in an atmosphere of despair and hopelessness as presented by Samuel Beckett in his play *Waiting for Godot*.

Michael Friedman in his book *Reconsidering Logical Positivism*, has set forth the most important facts and aspects of Logical Positivism, beginning from the very origin of the philosophy he has gone on to analyze the perspectives of its several proponents⁸.

A.J. Ayer is the editor of a book *Logical Positivism*. The book is a collection of the views of leading Positivists and provides an insight into Logical Positivism which could not have been drawn from any one source⁹.

However, none of the above mentioned texts except one has provided an insight into the relationship between Existentialism and Positivism, the authors have only ventured to discuss either of the two; therefore this research paper aims to combine these two strands of philosophical thought in a single text, thereby providing a comprehensive and comparative analysis of the two.

Existentialism

The idea I have never ceased to develop is in the end that a man can always make something out of what is made of him¹⁰.

⁶ Henri Peyre, "Existentialism: A Literature of Despair?", *Yale French Studies* (1948) : 21-32.

⁷ S.J. Frederick Copleston, *Contemporary Philosophy: Studies of Logical Positivism and Existentialism* (London: Burns and Oates, 1956).

⁸ Michael Friedman, *Reconsidering Logical Positivism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁹ A.J. Ayer, *Logical Positivism* (New York: The Free Press, 1959).

¹⁰ Jean Paul Sartre interview quoted in Marcuse Herbert, "Existentialism: Remarks on Jean Paul".

Regardless of its claims of being novel, Existentialism has its roots in the long tradition of Western philosophy going back at least to Socrates (469-399 B.C). However, the contemporary Existential attitude can be traced to what Marcel has called a confused and “broken world”¹¹. As Solomon has pointed out Existentialism was “the by-product of the Renaissance, the Reformation, the growth of science, the decline of Church authority, the French Revolution, the growth of mass militarism and technocracy, the two world wars, the ‘triumph’ of capitalism, and the sudden onslaught of globalism and its consequences, for which the world was clearly not prepared.”¹²

Amidst a confused environment where an individual feels himself aloof, isolated, threatened, insignificant and meaningless, an immediate and essential need arises for self-discovery. This in turn gives rise to an exaggerated sense of self-importance in some, and such a person begins to perceive himself “as a prophet or antichrist, as a revolutionary, as unique”¹³. As the world becomes more and more threatening and absurd and the individual feels himself “impotent in the face of the responsibility”¹⁴ to this world. This hopeless, lonesome being now seeks refuge “in rebellion, through art, through writing existential philosophy”¹⁵. Thus, Existential philosophy addresses the issues faced by the “concrete individual”¹⁶. It can be seen as the:

Philosophical realization of a self-consciousness living in a “broken world” (Marcel), an “ambiguous world” (de Beauvoir) a “dislocated world” (Merleau-ponty), a world into which we are “thrown” and “condemned” yet “abandoned” and “free” (Heidegger and Sartre), a world which appears to be indifferent or even “absurd” (Camus)¹⁷.

¹¹ Robert. C. Solomon, *Existentialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), xi.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid, xiii.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Thomas Flyne , *A Very Short Introduction to Existentialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

¹⁷ Ibid, xi.

Thus, it is aptly remarked by Herbert Marcuse that, “thought moves in the night but it is the night”¹⁸. However, to define Existentialism is to chew iron nuts, as words can hardly do justice in defining Existential philosophy. Its founders and proponents too are generally in agreement on this:

Existentialism is not a dead doctrine to be bottled and labeled. It is a living attitude that is yet defining and creating itself. As Nietzsche warns us in his *Genealogy of Morals*, ‘Only that which has no history can be defined’. And Sartre, rejecting an invitation to define existentialism, says, ‘It is in the nature of an intellectual quest to be undefined. To name it and define it is to wrap it up and tie the knot’.¹⁹

Nevertheless, we will make an attempt to understand what Existentialism actually is all about. Existentialism addresses the attitude of an individual toward life in this world. It is based on the notion – we are what we make ourselves to be; “its focus is on the individual’s pursuit of identity and meaning amidst”²⁰ the socio-economic pressures of society. Existentialism is the philosophy of freedom, “we are as responsible as we are free”²¹. Moreover, Existentialism encompasses every aspect of human life; it invites us “to examine the authenticity of our personal lives and of our society”.²²

Positivism

Positivism can simply be defined as “the state of being positive”. Strictly speaking positivism or logical positivism was one of “central strand in the fabric of twentieth century thought”²³, originating in Austria and Germany in the 1920’s. It can be defined more formally as,

¹⁸ Herbert Marcuse, "Existentialism: Remarks on Jean Paul Sartre's L'ETRE ET LE NEANT", 310.

¹⁹ Solomon, *Existentialism*, Xix-xx.

²⁰ Flyne, *A Very Short Introduction*, 8.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Michael Friedman, *Reconsidering Logical Positivism*, XI.

A theory that theology and metaphysics are earlier imperfect modes of knowledge and that positive knowledge is based on natural phenomena and their properties and relations as verified by the empirical sciences.²⁴

This theory like many other theories emphasizes the need to sort out the problems of life in one way or the other. Positivists are chiefly concerned about solving the problems of physical and social sciences. The bedrock of the theory is the notion that the prospects of life are based on nothing but practicability. Positivists are therefore against trying to find solutions to life's problem in metaphysics or theology. They are not inclined to ask questions which a philosopher might be expected to ask, but which have no answer. For instance, Heidegger, an Existentialist, poses the question, "Why is there anything at all and not rather nothing?"²⁵

Questions like this create an atmosphere of boredom, nothingness and a world without meaning or purpose. Positivists are not against Existentialism but they are against this bleak and confused environment and have presented a theory that deals with the very world [of individuals] of flesh and blood, based on empirical knowledge and giving definite and concrete solutions which exude optimism.

A.J. Ayer in his book *Logical Positivism* has the following to say about the philosophy:

Belief in the utility of symbolic techniques for clarifying philosophical issues. Its respect for scientific method, its assumption that in so far as philosophical problems are genuine at all they can be definitely solved by logical analysis. Generalizations are distrusted, particular examples are multiplied and carefully dissected.²⁶

²⁴ Merriam-Webster.com

²⁵ A.J. Ayer (ed.), *Logical Positivism*, 16.

²⁶ Ibid, 8.

Relationship between Existentialism and Positivism

The complex and dynamic environment of the twentieth century witnessed many upheavals in the sphere of politics, society, religion, philosophy and science. Leaving all other fields aside, if we talk only about philosophy, then Existentialism and Positivism, though both deal with human life and therefore share common ground, are vastly different in their respective approaches and it would not be wrong to claim that Logical Positivism has renewed itself in a “scientific spirit”²⁷ as against Existentialism and other movements of the time. According to Positivists, “Metaphysical theories are meaningless, meaningful statements are either analytic or conclusively verifiable or confirmable by observation and experiment”²⁸.

The theory further emphasizes this contention by asserting “whatever could be weighed and measured [quantified] could give us reliable knowledge, whereas”²⁹ the rest [is] “left to the realm of mere opinion”³⁰. The purpose of this approach is to “extract the subject from the experiment in order to obtain a purely impersonal”³¹ view. Sartre (1905-80) in response to this assumption of the Positivists, remarks that “the only theory of knowledge that can be valid today is one which is founded on the truth of metaphysics: the experimenter is part of the experimental system.”³²

The Existentialists are not really against the rationalistic approach of the Positivists, rather they simply question the ability of scientific reasoning in the extent to which it can be helpful in accessing the “deep personal convictions”³³ that form the basis of our lives. In this context, Nietzsche has emphasized the element of interpretation for all knowledge. According to him “there was no ‘original’, non-interpreted text”³⁴. What counts as knowledge is interpretation.

²⁷ Friedman, *Reconsidering Logical Positivism*, XII.

²⁸ Flyne, *A Short Introduction*, 3.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid, 4.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid, 13.

³⁴ Ibid.

There is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective 'knowing'; and the *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our 'concept' of this thing, our 'objectivity' be³⁵.

The Positivists' stress on facts is more vividly addressed by Nietzsche in his work *Will to Power*. The philosopher claims,

'There are only facts' – I would say: No, facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations. We cannot establish any fact 'in itself': perhaps it is folly to want to do such a thing.³⁶

While Existentialism represents the world of despair, the world which is so broken and enigmatic that it is impossible to change, and each human being is relentlessly in search of meaning, meaning that is "unique and specific in that it must and can be fulfilled by him alone"³⁷, it also indicates hope and faith, and provides a glimpse of optimism in that the world can be meaningful and purposeful and human existence can "retain its potential meaning"³⁸ despite the prevalent miserable conditions in this world. In other words, life's negative aspects *can be turned* into something positive. It is termed as "Tragic Optimism"³⁹.

Here we can glean a fine connection between the two extremes of Existentialism and Positivism, though the latter advocates the notion that one can remain positive by looking at concrete facts in an analytic manner, thereby avoiding all unnecessary philosophical questions or interpretations.

Thus, in the light of the above discussion it can be safely stated that both Existentialism and Positivism are two sides of the same coin, reflecting the very essence of optimism, and exuding positivism amidst "pain, guilt and

³⁵ Nietzsche quoted in Solomon, *Existentialism*, 96.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid, 355.

³⁸ Ibid, 357.

³⁹ Ibid.

death”⁴⁰ which are part and parcel of human existence. Similarly, by looking at the world in a logical way again highlights positivity,

‘Saying yes to life in spite of everything’ presupposes that life is potentially meaningful under any conditions, even those which are most miserable. And this in turn presupposes that the human capacity to creativity can turn life’s negative aspects into something positive or constructive. In other words, what matters is to make the best of any given situation⁴¹.

Existentialism presents itself as a way of life- so what is more factual, what is more concrete than life. Life is the ultimate reality; in this way Existentialism and Positivism surely have a meeting point. Nevertheless, one is supporting the other. Herbert Marcuse aptly remarks,

Existentialism has indeed a strong undertone of positivism: the reality has the last word.⁴²

The relationship exemplified in a work of literature

“If I do not reveal my views on justice in words, I do so by my conduct.” (Socrates to Xenophon)

Flyne points out “In a famous set of essays, ‘What is Literature?’ published in 1948; Sartre develops the concept of ‘committed literature’. His basic premise is that writing is a form of action for which responsibility carries over into the content and not just the form of what is communicated”.⁴³

According to Sartre there is a kind of relation between an artist and an audience, between a writer and a reader that is unique, and carries its own impact that is so powerful that it helps an artist to convey his individual point of view, juxtaposed with the subtlety of his knowledge and observation of the world. It is therefore the responsibility of an author to deliver an optimistic message through his writings. As Thomas Flyne puts it

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Marcuse, “Existentialism: Remarks”, 336.

⁴³ Flyne, *A Short Introduction*, 13.

"In other words, as we shall see, existentialism is developing a social conscience and with it, a conviction that the fine arts, literature at least, should be socially and politically committed"⁴⁴.

The world of literature is very much like a mirror to the real world; one can see the events, the movements, the men and manners, the changes and turmoils of an era in a work of literature.

"We have nothing to save them [human beings]... All we can do is to reflect in our mirrors their unhappy conscience, that is to say accelerate the decay of their principles. Our ungrateful task is to re-approach them with their faults when those faults have become curses."⁴⁵

As far as Existentialism is concerned, "the original quality of much literary work that it inspired appears only dimly through translations"⁴⁶ which are not easy to grasp however, for to a superficial reader it appears as the literature of immorality as well as pessimism. Since the formal beginning of Existentialism in the twentieth century, an element of pessimism is commonly associated with this philosophy, as the two are seen as indispensable to each other. However, as a matter of fact, if we browse through the history of literature, this element of pessimism can be traced back to the time of Sophocles and a score of other Greek dramatists and lyricists, including Seneca, who in the "splendid chorus of his tragedy, 'the Trojan Women' celebrated the return to nothingness which awaits men after their brief existence on this earth...."⁴⁷ Even the legendary English playwright of the 16th century, William Shakespeare, voiced through his characters the same feeling of meaninglessness of existence. In his own words, his play is nothing but a "tale told by an idiot signifying nothing" (words spoken by Macbeth in Act V, Scene V). He bade us "endure our going hence even as our coming hither. Ripeness is all"⁴⁸. From the Greek tragedians and lyricists and then Shakespeare we go to Thomas Hardy,

⁴⁴ Ibid, 14.

⁴⁵ Henri Peyre, *Existentialism: A Literature of Despair?* (Yale University Press, 1948), 31.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 21.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Dialogue spoken by Edgar in "King Lear", Act V, Scene II in Ibid.

Kafka and Faulkner⁴⁹ and we find the same pessimism in literature from all over the world, as it is the norm of human nature, in fact human existence. If pessimism is so essential an ingredient that literature since the Grecian era is pervaded by it, then

‘what attitude can be adopted by the modern writer’ who more than every man is ‘aware of the threats hanging’ over his head? ‘The easiest one and not the least charitable, is escapism. Literature after all, has always been called upon to adorn life and to weave garlands around the somber texture of reality.’ It always seems to stress ‘man’s ability to laugh in the midst of his sorrows and to preserve the gestures and conventions of civilized life’. There are certain others ‘who wisely let the world have its way’ because it is ‘wiser to enjoy the few benefits of life’ than to suffer in the attempt to improve it. Hebbel’s sally, quoted approvingly by Gide in his diary for 1937: What is the most sensible thing for the rat caught in the trap to do? Eat up the fat.⁵⁰

‘Waiting for Godot’

“In his drama or fiction, he stands for man’s ability to remain or to become the master of his fate. His characters are not doomed by heredity nor conditioned by outward circumstances.”⁵¹

‘Two homeless old men wait in a bare road with a single tree. They are in no particular time or place - nowhere and everywhere. Over two days they argue, get bored, clown around, repeat themselves, contemplate suicide, and wait. They’re waiting for the one who will never come. They’re waiting for Godot’. *Waiting for Godot* seems to have a unique resonance during times of social and political crisis. As a modernist existential meditation, it can at first appear bleak: ‘They give birth astride of a grave’, says Pozzo. ‘The light gleams an instant, then it’s night once more’. But it is

⁴⁹ Ibid, 22.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid, 24.

also funny and poetic, and reveals humanity's talents for stoicism, companionship and keeping going,⁵²

Samuel Beckett an Irish playwright, a man so tender at heart that he can weep on the brutal genocide of the Jews even forty years after it happened. "Was I sleeping while the others suffered?"⁵³ says, Vladimir in *Waiting for Godot*. He was a writer greatly influenced by the Existential philosophy. Beckett wrote many significant plays among which *Waiting for Godot* is considered the best. It is a universal play highlighting the pitiable plight of human existence amidst the environment of despair in the aftermath of the two world wars. While the backdrop of the play is grim, it emits a ray of hope by placing ultimate faith in the human capability to derive some good out of every bad; this is the underlying message of the play.

'Waiting for Godot' enables humanity to acknowledge the fact that while "the tears of the world are a constant quantity"⁵⁴ the corollary is that: "the same is true of the laugh."⁵⁵ Though the apparent tone of the play projects nothingness, boredom and pessimism the underlying message is to encourage humankind to seek its betterment:

Vladimir: it's the start that's difficult.
Estragon: you can start from anything.
Vladimir: yes, but you have to decide.⁵⁶

Beckett in the course of his masterpiece reminds humanity about its weaknesses and its apparently purposeless existence, but inspires it to look into the mirror to recognize its real face and thereby reform it.

Vladimir: all my life I've tried to put it from me, saying, Vladimir, be reasonable, you haven't yet tried everything.⁵⁷

⁵² David Smith, Imogen Carter and Ally Cornwath, "In Godot We Trust", *The Observer*, 8 March 2009.

⁵³ Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*, 90.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 33.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 63.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 9.

Vladimir and Estragon represent humanity in general, whatever they do, talk, think is all what humanity is experiencing. They are crying for help, and are in a state where they don't do anything constructive or practical,

Vladimir: We've nothing more to do here.

Estragon: Nor anywhere else.⁵⁸

"Nothing to be done"⁵⁹ is the core sentence of the play repeated several times, conveying passivity and hopelessness, but it just represents the condition of the existing human world. Despite the apparent hopelessness, Beckett conveys positivism: the hope that human beings would be able to stand up again. His characters talk of the step to be taken ahead, as in these lines:

Vladimir: 'let us not waste our time in idle discourse! ...let us do something, while we have the chance! It is not every day that we are needed... at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not... let us represent worthily for once the foul brood to which a cruel fate consigned us!'⁶⁰

Estragon: Suppose we got up to begin.

Vladimir: No harm in trying... simple question of will power.⁶¹

All these lines from the original text of *Waiting for Godot* provides encouragement and enlightenment to desperate humanity, which finds itself in an environment of hopelessness and boredom where there is "nothing to be done". Samuel Beckett by using the tool of Existentialism, first portrays a picture that is too bleak, where perhaps human beings are tired of living. But while they brood over their hopeless existence, they ask the question "what are we doing here?" They don't know the answer

⁵⁸ Ibid, 52.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 11.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 79.

⁶¹ Ibid, 84.

except “yes, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come”⁶².

Vladimir the other character then proclaims: “come, let’s get to work!” otherwise “in an instant all will vanish and we’ll be alone once more, in the midst of nothingness!”⁶³.

It is a call for only those who are alive, as Vladimir says “no point in exerting yourself if he’s dead.”⁶⁴ *Waiting for Godot* is a wakeup call for the entire human race living in a chaotic and confused state, where their questions are unanswered, their efforts go in vain, they have failed in finding the purpose of their existence; so if the sun still shines to give you light, if the earth is not shaken yet, if the sky is still there to provide you shelter, all that means hope is there, life is there, it is not yet too late, so stop waiting for GODOT, Godot will never arrive, will never listen to your cries for help, because it is only you who has to take a start. This idea is further enhanced through a speech by one of the characters in the play and aptly sums up this author’s argument on the topic.

Pozzo: When! When One day, is that not enough for you,
one day like any other day, one day he went dumb, one
day I went blind, one day we’ll go deaf, one day we were
born, one day we shall die, the same day, the same second,
is that not enough for you?⁶⁵

Conclusion

Existentialism is the philosophy of life, the search for meaning of an individual’s existence, which an individual can find for himself. In trying to find that meaning the journey he sets out on, ends in an abyss where he finds himself in a state of boredom, nothingness and purposelessness, as if life is a most absurd phenomenon. In 1946 when Camus came to America, to lecture, he described pessimism as follows:

⁶² Ibid, 80.

⁶³ Ibid, 81.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 87.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 89.

Is this pessimism? No, this is an honest effort to determine what is wanted, what unwanted... We young Frenchmen label as pessimists those who say that all is well and that nothing changes human nature. We call them pessimists because they are among those from whom nothing can be expected. They will be blamed if the world indeed never changes. But there are among us enough men of decision pledged to do all that is within their power to cure themselves and the world of their present sickness.⁶⁶

Positivism, on the other hand, provides a way to remain optimistic by avoiding metaphysical discussion, and instead focuses on the empirical and concrete facts of life. Existentialism no doubt appears as a nightmarish philosophy. However, there is a palpable undercurrent of positivity and hope. In a subtle way, it is aimed at extracting light out of darkness, thus, while the picture it paints of life is bleak, in the end it does emit rays of hope and fosters the fortitude to start again, because it is man alone who can find meaning in this absurd world, where nothing is going to change until he himself makes an effort. Albert Camus in a series of "Letters to a German Friend", which were published in some underground newspapers, described his creed in the following words:

I shall continue to believe that this world has no higher meaning. But I know that there is one thing in it that has meaning: man, because he alone demands to have meaning.⁶⁷

Therefore, Existentialism is directed towards drawing out humanity from its dormant state to an active one. And 'Waiting for Godot' is very apt in this context. As already pointed out, 'Waiting for Godot' has beautifully accomplished this task. Robert Solomon's words are very well suited to this discussion; he points out, "In the face of tragedy and in view of the human potential which at its best always allows for: (i) turning suffering into a human achievement and accomplishment; (ii) deriving from guilt the

⁶⁶ Albert Camus lecture quoted in William L. McBride, *Sartre's Life, Times and Vision du Monde* (London: Routledge, 1997), 82.

⁶⁷ Albert Camus, "Letters to a German Friend", in Justin O'Brien, *Resistance, Rebellion and Death*, trans. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961).

opportunity to change oneself for the better; and (iii) deriving from life's transitoriness an incentive to take responsible action.⁶⁸

Maurice Merleau-Ponty in his book *Humanism and Terror: An Essay on the Communist Problem* has also captured the realistic optimism of the Existentialist position in the social arena when he extended Sartre's humanistic mantra to the social realm:

The human world is an open or unfinished system and the same radical contingency which threatens it with discord also rescues it from the inevitability of disorder and prevents us from despairing of it.⁶⁹

In conclusion, the fact which has emerged in the course of this research is that, Positivism and Existentialism are two sides of the same coin. Neither Existentialism nor Existentialist writers are entirely metaphysical in their approach. They are indeed living in this very world of problems, they are deeply sensitive about the issues which form the core of human existence, most likely, more than any other strand of philosophy. Owing to their sensitivity with regards to the human condition, "their novels and plays are impregnated with the intellectual anguish" which is often mistaken as cynicism and human baseness. The fact is that the Existentialists were determined to think fearlessly and were convinced that they had to revolt against conformism in order to reform. Humanity is informed that they have to abandon all Utopian dreams, and stand on the firm ground of reality.

If this be called despair, let us admit that to such despair we must be grateful, for beyond it a vista of unlimited hope extends⁷⁰.

⁶⁸ Solomon, *Existentialism*, 358.

⁶⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Humanism and Terror: An Essay on the Communist Problem* (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2000); see also Gail Weiss, *Refiguring the Ordinary* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2008), 141.

⁷⁰ Henri Peyre, "Existentialism: A Literature", 32.