

I. Introduction

अर्जुन उवाच

किं तद्ब्रह्म किमध्यात्मं किं कर्म पुरुषोत्तम ।

अधिभूतं च किं प्रोक्तमद्यिदैवं किमुच्चते ॥

Arjuna inquired: O my Lord, O Supreme Person, what is Brahman?

What is the self? What are fruitive activities? What is this material manifestation? And what are the demigods? Please explain this to me.

(Gitopanishad Bhagavad-Gita As It Is 365)

Arjuna asked this question to Lord Krishna in the battlefield of Kurukshetra in 3102 B.C., just prior to the commencement of the Mahabharata War. But this perennial question is not confined to Arjuna alone. Since human life in itself is nothing but an indefinite search for meaning and value of this world, this question is all pervasive and relevant for all times. Man has been trying to find the answer of this question through two extremes. Either he goes to the extreme of pure reason (i.e., he tries to understand the phenomenon of this world and his own existence through reasoning and argumentation) or to the extreme of religion (i.e., he invents the concept of religion and God, and sees God as the maker of this world, including his own self). But both are insufficient, because neither religion is fully comprehensive nor human reason is infinite. And, therefore, the problem is unsolved. But here one simple question arises i.e. why, after all, does a person put himself in such an insoluble situation? The answer is equally simple, i.e. the search of identity is solely the legitimate answer to the loss of identity. Almost every reasonable fellow on this earth, falls, if not frequently then at least once, in this identity crisis. As human identity is not related to any one aspect, there can be innumerable reasons for this identity loss. To start with, in the simplest form, a child is born empty-minded and inexperienced (except the experiences gained in mother's womb). The moment it

takes birth, the outer environment starts playing its role, and also the child by adjusting itself accordingly. New relations with new expectations start taking place or even a child takes birth among already born expectations and relationships. As society has its own rules and regulations, every individual is expected to follow these norms. For some time, the child sees the world as it is told to see it. But as it grows up, it experiences the outer world according to its own perception and thus formulates its own conceptions, meanings, and conclusions about the world. However, the world is not rational which can be grappled through the laws of reason and logic. To put in different words, the world in itself is not formulated on any systematic way and is totally contradictory in its dealings. And if it is ever reasonable and meaningful, death sweeps away all the reason and meaning from it. Hence, it at once seems to be diverted when one tries to formulate any conclusion. This contradiction leads towards a kind of conflict which ultimately ends in the loss of individual identity and meaninglessness of the world. This is the simplest example of day-to-day life where a common human being is caught into the deep whirl of identity crisis. This sudden confrontation of the irrational and the meaningless might result in three possible situations. Firstly, this revelation might prove irritable and intolerable to the person and to quit such situation he might take refuge either in suicide or in Sanyas. Secondly, he might make an unsuccessful effort to create a balance between the outer and the inner. Thirdly (perhaps most appropriate and equally most difficult), he might accept the irrational and work within the bounds of it, fully realizing the truth that there is no standardized or generalized meaning of this world and there is a kind of forced-equilibrium, forced-unity between the mind (individual) that desires and the world that seems to fulfill that desire.

It would be very partial to consider the concept of identity crisis as a modern one. On the contrary, being related to the existence of human being, it is as old as human existence itself is and the question of existence and identity has teased mankind from the very beginning. This identity loss which our modern generation is feeling with too much intensity, might have felt by our first (imagined) parents - Adam and Eve when they were thrown in the unknown sphere of earth by their beloved God only because they had tried to go beyond His orders. In Sat Yuga, Sita might have felt this same identity-loss when her beloved husband Rama asked her to give the so called Agni-Pariksha to prove the purity of her character and her devotion towards him. Arjuna, in Dwapar Yuga, came across a similar kind of identity-crisis in the battle field of Kurukshetra. Like Shakespeare's Hamlet, he was caught into the conflicting situation of "to be or not to be" (*Hamlet* 26) when he witnessed his own dear Pitamah Bhishma, his beloved Guru Dronacharya, and many more, standing against him in the battlefield. Never, even in his dreams, had he thought about such a controversial situation when he had to kill his own kith and kin, and that was also for the sake of kingdom. When Krishna persuaded him to fight the battle, Arjuna started questioning the meaning of this world, including his self and the relation between the outer world and the self. The life of Prince Siddhartha also exemplifies the same quest. It is unavoidable to think that how a prince, being spared from all hard realities of life, becomes a monk after confronting with the realities of the world. In modern era when everything is so much complicated, this sense of loss has increased. Today, an identity is twisted in every minute in the name of sex, religion, caste, class, race etc. The modern phenomena like feminism, jihadism, racism, casteism, classism, etc. are the innumerable faces of imbalances which result in one or another kind of loss.

And this 'modern loss', somehow, becomes the reason for the popularity of existentialism as a way of life in the modern times.

What is Existentialism?

As a term, 'Existentialism' is often defined as a literary-political, psychoanalytical, religious, anti-religious, and philosophical movement which flourished in the European continent, immediately after the World War II. Generally speaking, writers as diverse as Dostoevsky, Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone-de-Beauvoir, Albert Camus, Gabriel Marcel, Martin Heidegger, and Karl Jaspers are considered to be the central figures of existentialism. And if we go for its origins, we are advised to go back into the nineteenth century to study the Danish theologian Soren Kierkegaard and the strange German genius Friedrich Nietzsche.

Any philosophy or literary movement, no doubt in which age or region it takes birth, has some fix terminology on which its proponents and followers agree. But even a superficial look, taken at the life as well as thoughts of the above said writers, indicates not their similarity but diversity. They have little that can be termed as common. Religiously, for example, Soren Kierkegaard is a devout Protestant; Sartre and Nietzsche are atheists for whom the concept of God is meaningless; Gabriel Marcel a devout Catholic; Jaspers a kind of non-sectarian theist; Heidegger an ambiguous atheist; and Camus a devout agnostic. Politically, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche are apolitical; Heidegger a Nazi; Sartre a Communist; and Camus an anti-communist and anti-ideological socialist. Further, most of the living existentialists (excluding Sartre and de-Beauvoir) have repudiated this label and others are surprised to be so described. Walter Kaufmann, an eminent critic of existentialism, goes to the extent of saying that the only thing the existentialists have in common is "a marked aversion for each other" ("Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre" 11).

But despite these differences, there is, after all, a family likeness among the existential thinkers. For all of them, it is the free individual who is of central importance, and it is the lived experience of the individual that is the touchstone of all knowledge. They reject, from the very beginning, all systematic thought of the abstract, the necessary, and the universal for the sake of the concrete, singular, and unique individuality.

Certainly, existentialism is neither a traditional philosophy which, usually, is based on some abstract notions, nor a school of thought reducible to any set of tenets. It is more an intellectual mood or atmosphere than a coherent creed or body of doctrines; more an outlook or mindset than a philosophical party line; more a method or approach than a school of fixed patterns of thought. No doubt, as a way of life it is present throughout the history of human existence, but as a crystallized power, it is very much the creature of the wasteland of Europe, during and after, devastated by two world wars. It bloomed in its full swing in the desert of despair and gloom when Martin Heidegger brought forth his dark and labyrinthine metaphysical work *Being and Time*; when Sartrean philosophical work *Being and Nothingness*, his novel *Nausea*, and his plays *The Flies* and *No Exit*, burst upon the European scene; when Albert Camus published his novel *The Stranger* and his philosophical essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*. All the above enunciated works are the expression of a pervasive intellectual mood in the post-war Europe – the mood of despair, doubt, and anguish.

No doubt, the philosophy of Sartre, the metaphysics of Heidegger, and the novels of Camus transcend their age, as they are for all times and not merely of historical or antiquarian value, interesting just in so far as they sum up and reflect a particular moment in history. But their enormous popularity is due, to a large extent, to the fact that they chimed in with the spirit of the times. It was the time of collapsing

beliefs as mass execution was practiced in Nazi concentration camps and the unpredictable devastation of Nagasaki and Hiroshima was done through atom bombs. It was an era of total despair and these writers expressed in philosophy and literature what post-war European people felt in their bones – the fact that their traditional and familiar world of moral and social values had collapsed; that God was not in His heaven and all was not well in the world; that either there was no God, or if He was, He was a weaker one who couldn't combat with the evil, or more devastating, He himself was evil. This was the age of the end of ideology. The novelist, Saul Bellow, captures this insight with the rumination of the character Moses Herzog in his book of that title:

But what is the philosophy of this generation? Not God is dead, that point was passed long ago. Perhaps it should be stated Death is God. This generation thinks – and this is its thought of thoughts – that nothing faithful, vulnerable, fragile can be durable or have a true power. Death waits for these things as a cement floor waits for a dropping light bulb. The brittle shell of glass loses its tiny vacuum with a burst, and that is that. (qtd. in Flynn 53-54)

Karl Jaspers also finds the World Wars as the reason for the prevalence of existentialist mood as he says, “Then in 1914 the World War caused the great breach in our European existence. The paradisiacal life before the World War, naïve despite all its sublime spirituality, could never return: philosophy, with its seriousness, became more important than ever” (“On My Philosophy”160).

Such were the circumstances for the sprouting of this existentialist mood, which rejected all that was established on moral or natural rules and puts its full faith in the integrity of man. It was a shift from God to Man.

The term 'Existentialism' was first used by Gabriel Marcel to define Sartrean philosophy. In an interview to Pierre Vicary, Simone de Beauvoir affirms this fact:

When Sartre first started writing *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre didn't call himself an Existentialist. The origin of the term was contingent and capricious. It was in fact Gabriel Marcel who first applied the term to Sartre, in the course of a discussion with a group of Dominicans at Le Cerf. At the time Sartre rejected this definition of himself saying that he was indeed a philosopher of existence but that "Existentialism" did not mean anything. But subsequently, Sartre and I, and his followers, were described as being Existentialists so often that we stopped objecting to this definition of ourselves. (Charlesworth 6)

Though much has been said about the genealogy of existentialism, yet it is very difficult to define it as a term, because of its loose and reckless application. Sartre rightly comments in his lecture *Existentialism is a Humanism* that "the word is now so loosely applied to many things that it no longer means anything at all" (347).

But despite the difficulty to phrase the meaning of existentialism in a definition, it can be fully understood through its major thematic concerns which have been discussed time and again by major existentialists.

The first and foremost idea of existentialists (both theists and atheists), as adhered by Sartre, is "existence precedes essence, or, if you prefer, that subjectivity must be the starting point" (*Existentialism and Human Emotions* 13). From Plato to Hegel, including Descartes, Leibnitz, Diderot, Voltaire and Kant, whether they are theists or atheists, all believe in the notion that essence is prior to existence i.e., man is the product of the idea of man in the mind of God like a paper-knife or a book or a chair which is present in the mind of the artist before its production. But

existentialism denies this ‘thingness’ of man, as Sartre argues in *Existentialism is a Humanism*:

Man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world – and defines himself afterwards. If man as an existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself.

(349)

Existentialism is often criticized as an irresponsible philosophy, but Sartre repudiates this charge and says that existentialism “puts every man in possession of himself as he is, and places the entire responsibility for his existence squarely upon his own shoulders” (*Existentialism is a Humanism* 349-50). Again, existential responsibility is not a limited concept, rather it includes in itself the broader aspect of responsibility i.e. social responsibility.

The existentialists have used, with great profundity, the eloquent words like anguish, abandonment, despair etc. to present man’s condition. For Sartre, anguish is the anxiety felt by every man because it is connected with profound responsibility:

The existentialists say at once that man is in anguish. What that means is this: the man who involves himself and who realizes that he is not only the person he chooses to be, but also a lawmaker who is, at the same time, choosing all mankind as well as himself, cannot help escape the feeling of his total and deep responsibility. (*Existentialism and Human Emotions* 18)

Kierkegaard used the term ‘angst’ or ‘dread’ to examine man’s situation. Heidegger used his favourite word ‘abandonment’ to describe man’s pathetic situation which is directly related to the absence of God and presence of death.

Death of God is not a rejoicing situation for the existentialists. On the other hand, it is very embarrassing, because with the absence of God, there disappear all the possibilities of finding values in the world. Since there is no Perfect Consciousness to think about, there can be no longer any prior good. Dostoevsky once wrote in *Brothers Karamazov*, “If God does not exist, everything would be permitted” (qtd. in Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism* 353). In the death of God, man becomes forlorn and without excuses. He is abandoned in the world, without his desire, with full freedom. And it is, therefore, that this freedom becomes a condemnation as Sartre affirms in his lecture *Existentialism is a Humanism*, “. . . man is condemned to be free. Condemned, because he did not create himself, yet is nevertheless at liberty, and from the moment that he is thrown into this world he is responsible for everything he does” (353).

Existentialism is often seen as a shock to all kinds of traditional intellectual establishments. On one hand, the idealists and other moral philosophers are alarmed by its disregard for traditional schemes of value; on the other, the positivists and analytical philosophers become outraged by its willingness to abandon rational categories of knowledge established by Descartes, Newton, Kant, and Hegel. Contrary to traditional values, existentialism rejects the fact of the world as having any predestined and coherent meaning. It believes in the created meaning – the meaning that is created by Man through free will, choice, and responsibility. Plato, the earliest idealist perceives man as the representative of the idea of man in the mind of supreme God. But, existentialists reject this conception from the very outset and opine that there is nothing like human nature. For them, every person is what he/ she chooses to be and therefore, can’t escape from the responsibility of his/ her actions by blaming the external factors like God or society or system for the consequences. Contrary to

naturalism and realism of the 18th and 19th century which lead one to treat everyman as an object, existentialism endows its full faith in man's integrity. Sartre, in his article "A More Precise Characterization of Existentialism", points out the same thing:

. . . and everyone in the eighteenth century thought that all men had a common essence called *human nature*. Existentialism, on the contrary, maintains that in man – and in man alone – existence precedes essence. This simply means that man first *is*, and only subsequently is this or that. In a word, man must create his own essence: it is in throwing himself into the world, suffering there, struggling there, that he gradually defines himself. (*The Writings of Jean-Paul Sartre* 157)

Likewise, there is an intentional refusal to an integrated and systematic approach in Friedrich Nietzsche. He despises the systematic philosophy of Hegel, Kant, Schopenhauer, and Spinoza. All of them have tried to seek knowledge through their particular philosophy. But Nietzsche insists that there is no single stroke by which all philosophical dilemmas can be resolved and that, each philosophical proposition is capable of standing independently without a system for support. For him, the process of searching truth through a systematic approach is not merely a bad philosophical method but inherently dishonest. He writes, "The will to a system, in a philosopher, morally speaking, is a subtle corruption, a disease of character. . . . I am not bigoted enough for a system, not even for my system. The will to a system is a lack of integrity. (qtd. in Solomon 108).

This same disintegration is evident in Kierkegaard who prefers Socrates as his philosophical hero, because Socrates prefers his individuality at the stake of system. He rejects the system because the subjective individual is ignored by it. Criticizing

Hegel's systematic philosophy, Kierkegaard argues, "Hegel built his great philosophical system and then lived in a little hole alongside it" (quoted in Charlesworth 9). Emphasizing Kierkegaard's same point of view Wardlaw, in an interview to Charlesworth, opines:

Hegel tried to understand the whole of reality within an all-embracing system. But Kierkegaard regarded that whole operation as a distraction from the pressing and important issues of concrete existence, and so he regarded this particular kind of philosophical undertaking as really leading one away into a realm of fantasy. (Charlesworth 13-14)

Therefore, it is clear that for Kierkegaard "the main questions facing man are questions that are to be discovered in the concrete details of particular human existence . . . the human existence of the individual, and in the kind of struggles he has to find his standing in the world and to discover a way forward for himself" and not through any system (Charlesworth 9).

The same kind of despise for systematic approach to philosophy is noteworthy in Heidegger, Sartre, Jaspers, Marcel, and Camus. Sartre writes that "lived experience is the only valid criterion of truth and I must always ask what does this mean to me, this individual human existence." So Jaspers says, "I can't verify anything saves through my personal being, and I have no other rule than this personal being itself." Gabriel Marcel puts it in a striking epigram and says, "We do not study problems of philosophy, we are those problems" (qtd. in Charlesworth 9).

Albert Camus expresses the same thought when he writes, "I understand then why the doctrines that explain everything to me also debilitate me at the same time. They relieve me of the weight of my own life and yet I must carry it alone" (qtd. in Graham 75).

Apart from being anti-traditional and anti-systematic, existentialism is also an anti-rational and anti-empirical outlook. It rejects the claims of rationalism and empiricism that the universe is based upon some rules of physical science and that man is fully capable of solving all problems of science, philosophy, and life by the correct application of his reason and experiences. Newton, the most eminent rationalist and empiricist, views the world as senseless. He comments:

The universe is no longer primarily a manifestation of God. . . . The universe is a senseless, purposeless attraction and repulsion, collision and rebounding of so many mindless, passive bodies. The world is an all encompassing machine operating according to the natural laws. . . . The universe is nothing but this system of moving bodies. It is Godless, deanimated, and purposeless. (Solomon 11)

No doubt, in Newtonian universe, there is no place for Divine Will; but there is no place for human will even. To him, man, like other bodies, is merely one more body obeying Newtonian laws of motion in the same senseless and purposeless fashion as all other bodies do. Therefore, every occurrence (no matter initiated by a living person or happened to a non-living object) is based upon the Principle of Universal Causality. But the existentialists denounce this principle, not because they are anti-science or irrationals; they reject it because it deprives man from his very attribute which uplifts him from the rest –his free will and the responsibility of his actions. If every occurrence is the natural consequence of some set of antecedent natural conditions, then human actions are also pre-determined, independent of any motives, intentions, decisions, or free will of the agent. If actions are nothing but events determined by previous events, then humans do not really ‘act’ at all, they are merely machines moving in accordance with natural laws and totally free from the

responsibility of their so called 'actions'. But as it is well known, existentialism is the proponent of free will and responsibility. It rejects for any coherent meaning of this world and propounds that man alone is the creator of meaning through free will, choice, and responsibility; that each person is what he or she chooses to be, and that no one can escape from the responsibility of one's actions by blaming the external factors for the consequences. Sartre elaborates this idea in his *Existentialism is a Humanism* and says, "Man simply is . . . he is what he wills. . . . Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. That is the first principle of existentialism" (349). Apart from the exclusion of free will, it is the omnipotence of logical argument and scientific reasoning that provokes existentialists for being anti-rational. They simply question the ability of such reasoning to access the deep personal convictions that guide our lives. They realize that "life does not follow the continuous flow of logical argument and that one often has to risk moving beyond the limits of the rational in order to live life to the fullest" (Flynn 3). Following the same thought process, Kierkegaard criticizes the dialectical rationalism of Hegel and says, "Trying to live your life by this abstract philosophy is like trying to find your way around Denmark with a map on which that country appears the size of a pinhead" (qtd. in Graham 72).

Hence, it is quite clear from the above discussion that being a philosophy of man, his free will, and his free choice, existentialism is a refusal to all that mars real life. Walter Kaufmann has rightly said:

The refusal to belong to any school of thought, the repudiation of the adequacy of any body of beliefs whatever, and especially of systems, and a marked dissatisfaction with traditional philosophy as superficial, academic, and remote from life – this is the heart of existentialism. ("Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre" 12)

Despite its claims to be novel and unprecedented, existentialism represents a long tradition in the history of philosophy, not only in the West, but in the East also. Kaufmann, validating its timelessness says, “Existentialism is a timeless sensibility that can be discerned here and there in the past; but it is only in the recent times that it has hardened into a sustained protest and preoccupation” (“Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre” 12). The same argument is re-affirmed by William Barrett in his book, *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy*, where he argues that what we now call existentialist impulse “is coeval with the myths of Abraham and Job; it is evident in the pre-Socratic philosophies of Greece, in the dramas of Aeschylus and Euripides, and in the later Greek and Byzantine culture of mystery; and it is a thread that winds, seldom dominant but always present, through the central European tradition” (69-70). Further, “in the Orient, concurrently, the entire development of the religious and philosophical attitudes, particularly in the Buddhist and Taoist writings, seems to us now to have been frequently closer to the actual existence of mankind than the rationalist discourses of the West” (Barrett 125). However, in spite of these precursors and analogues we would be gravely wrong to deny the modernity of Existentialism.

Socrates has been hailed by every existentialist as the existential hero, who preached and practiced philosophy as the care of the self above all, and who had to pay with his life for his emphasis upon the lived experience instead of an abstract set of theoretical truth. Responding to Xenophon he argued, “If I do not reveal my views on justice in words, I do so by my conduct” (qtd. in Flynn 1).

From Socrates to Kierkegaard (who is considered as the father of existentialism), there are many names who can be hailed as existentialists in their own ways. William Shakespeare, the emperor of English drama, seems to be familiar with

the idea that man is thrown into the world, abandoned to a life that ends in death, with nothing after that. In *Macbeth*, this existential nothingness is fully expressed when Macbeth contemplates about the meaning of life and says:

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. (101)

The same sense of absurdity of life can be discerned in *The Tempest*:

We are such stuff
 As dreams are made on, and our little life
 Is rounded with a sleep. (104)

But, despite having the knowledge of the meaninglessness of the world, Shakespeare “also knew self-sufficiency. He had the strength to face reality without excuses and illusions and did not even seek comfort in the faith in immortality” (Kaufmann, *From Shakespeare to Existentialism: Studies in Poetry, Religion, and Philosophy* 3).

John Milton though, justifies the ways of God in *Paradise Lost*, yet intentionally or unintentionally, gives prominence to man's desire to choose, to be free, and to bear the responsibility of his choices. Adam and Eve, no doubt seduced by Satan, eat the prohibited fruit and thus prefer their freedom of choice to God's command. Again, arguing against Platonic conception of reason, and of virtue enforced by law and censorship, Milton cites in *Areopagitica* that “reason is but choosing” (qtd. in Kaufmann, “Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre” 52).

Major Existentialists

There is no reason for calling the Russian orthodox Christian, Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881) an existentialist. But after reading his *Notes from the Underground* (1864), which has been hailed by Kaufmann as the “the best overture for existentialism ever written”, it becomes necessary to add him in the existentialists’ list (“Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre” 14). This polemic is full of the basic concepts of existentialism – like individuality, free will, an aversion for all kinds of natural, scientific, and universal laws, and a salutation for man’s free will, his intention and his freedom. He criticizes the basic formula of all natural sciences which counts everything in the mathematical formula of ‘twice two makes four’ and therefore, mars all kind of individuality. When one tries to break this ‘stone wall’ of laws, Dostoevsky alarms:

. . . they will shout at you, “it is no use protesting: it is a case of twice two makes four! Nature does not ask your permission, she has nothing to do with your wishes, and whether you like her laws or dislike them, you are bound to accept her as she is, and consequently all her conclusions. A wall, you see, is a wall . . . and so on, and so on.”

(Notes from Underground 61)

Science and natural laws have tried to convert man into a thing, “something of the nature of a piano-key or the stop of an organ by announcing that whatever man does is not done by his willing it, but is done by itself, by the laws of nature” (Dostoevsky 70). Such a situation is like living in the “Palace of Crystal” where there’ll be answer for everything (Dostoevsky 71). But Dostoevsky believes, not in natural laws, but in man’s intention, his desire for free will which will break this crystal palace. He suggests in the same book, “I say, gentlemen, hadn’t we better kick

over the whole show and scatter rationalism to the winds . . . and to enable us to live once more at our own sweet foolish will!” (71).

He argues that what man wants is simply independent choice, whatever that independence may cost and wherever it may lead to him. He says, “. . . that man everywhere and at all times, whoever he may be, has preferred to act as he chose and not at least as his reason and advantage dictated” (71).

Like Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky denounces the omnipotence of reason and places man’s free will above it. He writes in *Notes from the Underground*, “. . . reason is an excellent thing, there’s no disputing that, but reason is nothing but reason and satisfies only the rational side of man’s nature, while will is a manifestation of the whole life, that is, of the whole human life including reason and all the impulses” (77).

More likely to Sartre, Dostoevsky believes in man’s process of becoming. He opines that the real value of man lies not in his being something but in his process of becoming. He states about man:

He loves the process of attaining, but does not quite like to have attained . . . because, mathematical certainty is, after all, something insufferable. . . . I admit that twice two makes four is an excellent thing, but if we are to give everything its due, twice two makes five is something a very charming thing too. (*Notes from the Underground* 78)

Therefore, being the propagator of free will and human intention, Dostoevsky secures a place for himself in the long train of existentialists.

Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), the Danish theologian, is often called as the father of the theistic existentialism. His important works like *Either/ Or* (1843), *Fear*

and Trembling (1843), *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844), *Stages on Life's Way* (1845), and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments* (1846) etc. explore the basic concepts of existentialism.

Though he believes in Christianity and ascribes to the religious stage (among the aesthetic stage, ethical stage, and religious stage of life) the highest of importance, Kierkegaard proves to be a philosophical guide to Sartre, Jaspers, Heidegger, and Camus. Apart from his being an anti-systematic, anti-Hegelian, and anti-rational, the one aspect which at once puts him in the existentialists' category is his perseverance for subjectivity and individuality and an insistent denial for conformity. He opines that it is the conformity of ideas that converts the individual into crowd and, therefore, all of the individual actions into nothing but untruth. His repulsion for conformity is evident when he writes in his book, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, "I conceived it as my task to create difficulties everywhere" (87). His absorption for the subjectivity is equally evident when he says that subjectivity is truth and truth subjectivity. Objective truth is nothing but the crowd mentality for him. He writes in his book *"That Individual": Two Notes Concerning My Work as an Author* (1859) that ". . . the communicator of truth can only be a single individual . . . for the truth consists precisely in that conception of life which is expressed by the individual" (98). Emphasizing the existential concept of responsibility, Kierkegaard dismisses the crowd-mentality, because of its being faceless, truth less, and irresponsible. He elaborates this concept by exemplifying it and thus says:

. . . a crowd in its very concept is the untruth, by reason of the fact that it renders the individual completely impenitent and irresponsible, or at least weakens his sense of responsibility by reducing it to a fraction. Observe that there was not one single soldier that dared lay hands upon

Caius Marius – this was an instance of truth. But given merely three of four women with the consciousness or the impression that they were a crowd, and with hope of a sort in the possibility that no one could say definitely who was doing it or who began it –then they had courage for it. What a falsehood! (“*That Individual*”: *Two Notes Concerning My Work as an Author* 95)

Kierkegaard affirms that Christianity is unreasonable and paradoxical. But it doesn't mean that it is truthless. Contrary to it, it has subjective value which can't be deciphered into objective meaning. He observes, “It is subjectivity that Christianity is concerned with, and it is only in subjectivity that its truth exists, if it exists at all; objectively, Christianity has absolutely no existence” (qtd. in Graham 87).

It is in the name of the individual that Kierkegaard writes polemics attacking the three most potent forces of conformity in the Copenhagen of his day, namely – the popular press, the State Church, and the reigning philosophy that of G.W.F. Hegel. The popular press, in his view, does people's thinking for them, the Church their believing for them, and the Hegelianism their choosing for them. In other words, Hegel's philosophy transforms a challenging ‘either/or’ into a comfortable ‘both-and’. These ideas of Kierkegaard isolate him from the established society, and in this way, the propagandist of ‘individuality’ himself becomes an ‘Individual’. The same individuality is desired by him even after his death as he writes in “*That Individual*”, “And yet, if I were to desire an inscription for my tombstone, I should desire none other than “*That Individual*” –if that is not now understood, it surely will be” (100).

Like most of the existentialists, Kierkegaard is hostile to pure reason and to be sure, he echoes Luther's famous dicta: “Whoever wants to be a Christian should tear the eyes out of his reason. . . . You must part with reason and not know anything of it

and even kill it; else one will not get into the kingdom of heaven. . . . Reason is a whore” (qtd. in Kaufmann, “Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre” 18).

Choice is the basic concept of existentialism and Kierkegaard remunerates much weight to it. Like Sartre, he believes that to exist is to choose and to cease to choose is to cease to be. Our entire life is nothing but an ongoing choice and that the failure to choose is itself a choice for which we are equally responsible. He states, “My either/or doesn’t in the first instance denote the choice between good and evil, it denotes the choice whereby one chooses good and evil/or excludes them” (qtd. in Flynn 33).

In his book, *Stages on Life’s Way*, Kierkegaard provides three spheres (the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious) of existence which, in all, trace the process of becoming an individual. Each stage has its own model – Don Juan for the aesthetic, Socrates for the ethical, and Abraham for the religious spheres. Kierkegaard opines that to choose is to be individual and the highest form of individuality is the religious stage where choice is made, neither upon the pleasure, nor the ethical bases, but through the “leap of faith” towards the God (qtd. in Flynn 34). Abraham is the real individual who, ignoring all ethical considerations of right and wrong, decides to kill his only son Isaac at God’s commandment. Kierkegaard summarizes his ideas on the different stages or spheres in his book *Stages on Life’s Way*, and says:

There are three existence-spheres, the aesthetic, the ethical, the religious. . . . The ethical sphere is only a transition sphere and therefore its highest expression is repentance as a negative action. The aesthetic sphere is the sphere of immediacy, the ethical the sphere of requirement (and this requirement is so infinite that the individual always goes bankrupt), the religious the sphere of fulfillment, but

please note, not a fulfillment such as when one fills an alms box or a sack with gold, for repentance has specifically created a boundless space and as a consequence the religious contradiction: simultaneously to be out on 70,000 fathoms of water and yet be joyful. (qtd. in Flynn 27)

The concepts like ‘nothing’, ‘dread’, and ‘freedom’, which are pervasive through the later writings of existentialists, like Heidegger and Sartre, are first taken home by Kierkegaard in his most important book *The Concept of Dread*. The concepts of ‘nothing’ and ‘dread’, which eventually are initiator of ‘freedom’, are explained through another concept of ‘innocence’:

Innocence is ignorance. . . . In this state there is peace and repose; but at the same time there is something different, which is not dissension and strife, for there is nothing to strive with. What is it then? Nothing. But what effect does nothing produce? It begets dread. This is the profound secret of innocence, that at the same time it is dread. (Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Dread* 101)

Differentiating dread from fear, Kierkegaard argues that fear is originated for something which is finite; but dread is the product of nothing, or of the absence of something. He says in *The Concept of Dread*, “I must therefore call attention to the fact that it is different from fear and similar concepts which refer to something definite, whereas dread is the reality of freedom as possibility anterior to possibility” (101). Therefore, dread is the apprehension of the possibility of freedom. This idea is explained through an example taken from the Genesis where God said to Adam, “Only of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat” (qtd. in Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Dread* 103). This prohibition induces a state of dread in

Adam, because it awakens in him the possibility of freedom which Adam eventually takes.

Hence, Kierkegaard's theology, as well as his philosophy, touches the most important aspects of existentialism. However, starting from a state of doubt, his philosophy seems to take refuge in the same doubt by taking a leap of faith in the absurd God.

While Kierkegaard's philosophy concludes with the assumption of believing in subjective Christianity and of attaining Truth through the leap of faith, Nietzsche's philosophy, like Sartre, begins with the assumption that "God is dead" (*The Gay Science* 126). Nietzsche's 'death of God' should not be mistaken with atheism, because Nietzsche is not interested in the existence or non-existence of God. Emphasizing upon the same point, Solomon writes:

Nietzsche is interested in the belief in God as a cultural phenomenon, like the young Hegel (and like Dostoevsky), with the effects of such a belief on the moral conception of life in a people. In short, it is belief in God that makes morality possible . . . and Nietzsche is concerned with the status of moral principles once this belief is lost. (116)

Like Sartre and Heidegger, who learned much from him, Nietzsche finds the death of God to be a matter of an urgent concern; as such idea inevitably leads one to madness.

It is the death of God which gives birth to Nietzsche's most important concept of nihilism, which means the negation for the existence of absolute values of good and evil. As there is no Absolute Law, no moral principles can be ultimately justified.

Nietzsche's concept of nihilism is often charged as a destructive and negative philosophy, but, it is destructive only in the sense of destroying a field of weeds to

plant a garden, the garden in which the seeds of power to will and *Übermensch* (overman) are to be grown. Unlike Kierkegaard, who seems to be afraid of this nihilistic crisis and tries to run away from the meaninglessness and absurdity of the world through a leap in the Christianity and the reconfirmation of God and his morality, Nietzsche is ready to fight back this absurdity through the revaluation of old values and creation of the new ones. And this task of creating new values is given by Nietzsche to *Übermensch*. Nietzsche's *Übermensch* (Overman) is "an idealistic type of a higher kind of human being, half saint, half genius" (Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* 132). He is not of any other land's man but the 'individual' of Kierkegaard, the 'free man' of Sartre, and the 'Being' of Heidegger, who has the ability to stand aloof from the herd mentality and to decide his own way of life.

Both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche work as guides for the upcoming existential philosophers. Martin Heidegger (1889- 1976), the German philosopher, is among some of the modern philosophers who are influenced both by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Basically a phenomenologist, Heidegger is often credited with initiating the existential movement in its twentieth century form. Though he thoroughly rejects the label of existentialist, Heidegger proves to be the true guide for the French atheistic existentialism of Sartre and others. Viciously attacked for his being a Nazi during Hitler regime, Heidegger is equally acclaimed for his contribution in phenomenology as well as for making existentialism a serious philosophical movement. Much motivated by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, Heidegger is concerned with individual human existence. In his first major treatise on phenomenology, *Being and Time* (1927), he thoroughly rejects all that is pre-established by logic or reason. He questions the adequacy, both of traditional philosophy and traditional language. To him, ordinary language and ordinary ways of thinking, including everyday logic

and reason, is permeated with philosophical prejudices. Therefore, in its search for truth, philosophy must become inventor of language – the best language for providing us with an original view of Being.

But Heidegger's claims against logic and reason should not be mistaken as anti-logical or unreasonable. What is rejected here is not logic, but only the mechanical application of rules of inference which have not been subjected to philosophical scrutiny. This rejection is for the sake of achieving an unprejudiced and non-conceptual perspective of philosophy.

To stress his departure from traditional philosophical thinking, Heidegger often refers to his own endeavor as Thinking (Denken). Solomon explores Heidegger's idea of Thinking and says:

By this general term, he wishes to stress the unprejudiced and broad scope of his philosophy. Thinking for Heidegger, is the search for unprejudiced truth, specifically, unprejudiced truth about Being. This kind of thinking, Heidegger stresses, is a special sort of activity, and not the sort of 'thinking' we do about a mathematics problem or the problem of buying a new car. (191)

This sort of thinking has been neglected throughout philosophy, as Heidegger says, "The most thought-provoking thing in our thought-provoking age is that we still are not thinking" (*What is Called Thinking* 3).

The gist of Heidegger's philosophy is the endeavour to state the problem of Being which has been much neglected by traditional philosophy, as he opines, "What if it were possible that man, that nations in their greatest movements and traditions, are linked to Being and yet had long fallen out of Being, without knowing it, and that

this was the most powerful and most central cause of their decline?” (*Introduction to Metaphysics* 30).

‘What it means to be’ is the metaphysical question which interests Heidegger. To him, it is more important to ask what it means to exist rather to ask whether a particular entity exists. This essence of existence has been neglected by the philosophers and only first time affirmed by him, as he states, “In *Sein and Zeit* (*Being and Time*) the question of the meaning of “Being” is raised and developed as question for the first time in the history of philosophy” (*Introduction to Metaphysics* 70).

This existential question of ‘Being’ can be asked and resolved only by a particular kind of entity – human being or Dasein. Describing Dasein, Heidegger writes in his book *Being and Time*:

Dasein is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it. . . . It is peculiar to this entity that with and through its Being, this Being is disclosed to it. Understanding of Being is itself a definite characteristic of Dasein’s Being. (12)

In this sense, Heidegger uplifts human beings above other entities by ascribing, only to them, the attribute of understanding Being. Dasein has “‘being’ in such a way that one has an understanding of “Being”” (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 12). Because of this essential relationships of Dasein (human being) to Being, the ontological approach of Being “must be sought in the existential analytic of Dasein” (Heidegger, *Being and Time* 13). Hence, to get an approach of Being, the study of Dasein is must, as Heidegger affirms, “If to interpret the meaning of Being becomes our task, Dasein is not only the primary entity to be interrogated; it is also that entity

which already comports itself, in its Being, towards what we are asking about when we ask this question” (*Being and Time* 14-15).

While analyzing Dasein, Heidegger talks about a very important distinction, between the conceptions of ontic and ontological. Ontic is an adjectival form of existence, and might be interpreted as having to do with existence or simply existent. On the other hand, ontological is “the study of being” (Solomon 199). Hence, an ontological investigation is one which asks question of Being. Heidegger tells us that Dasein is essentially ontological, which means that Dasein necessarily asks about Being. He writes in *Being and Time*, “Dasein is ontically distinctive in that it is ontological” (12). Therefore, only Dasein has this property of being ontological, while everything else that exists is ontic.

In his book *Being and Time*, Heidegger introduces various existential structures of Dasein like existenz, authenticity, inauthenticity, facticity, being- in-the world, being-unto-death, das Man, angst, etc., most of them later popularized by Sartre. These structures can either initiate Dasein to evolve out Being or to dissociate itself from Being. The first of such structures is Existenz which refers to “Dasein as the projector of possibilities” (Solomon 210). Heidegger has borrowed this notion of Existenz from Kierkegaard, who has used it for the truly existing human beings who recognize their possibilities. It separates such human beings from those men with their so-called existences (the crowd) who do not realize their possibilities. Like Kierkegaard, Heidegger also insists that freedom of choice and recognition of this freedom is the very essence of Existenz and therefore, “the ‘essence’ of Dasein consists of its Existenz” (*Being and Time* 42). And it is from here that Sartre seems to take his famous slogan that 'existence precedes essence'. With Existenz, there comes a pair of possibilities, the possibility of being authentic (recognizing and choosing

oneself) and being inauthentic (ignoring and refusing one's choices). This rejection of choice is itself a choosing between choosing and not choosing. Like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, Heidegger rejects any prior-rational guidelines for making one choice over another. Dasein is totally free or rather Dasein itself is freedom. It is noteworthy that Heidegger insists that Existenz is possibility and does not simply say that Existenz has possibilities. The only thing which is not part of Dasein's Existenz is facticity, because Dasein necessarily finds himself in a particular, irreducible, and unbracketable world of real objects which is not chosen by him. In other words, Dasein finds himself thrown into a particular world without his choice. For example, I find myself being born in a lower-middle-class Indian society, with traits inherited from my parents, with a personality particularly determined by my early childhood, and with responsibilities and expectations thrust upon me by my situation in life. No doubt, I am free to choose, but my Existenz or my freedom is always a range of possibilities regarding my facticity. This thrownness/ facticity is the initiator of Kierkegaardian as well as Heideggerian mood of dread or Angst.

Apart from the above said structures of Dasein, Heidegger separates himself from his master Husserl by introducing another structure of Dasein i.e., Dasein as 'being-in-the world'. Heidegger formulates the idea that the basic endeavour of phenomenology is to study the problem of Being, a problem which has been allegedly neglected by Husserl through his subject-object dualism. While for Husserl, phenomenological investigation must begin by bracketing the real world and the real objects of the world ('noumena' of Kant) and focus its attention solely on the appearances ('phenomena' of Kant) of the world and its objects as they are perceived by consciousness. But for Heidegger, as for Sartre and Ponty, this presupposition is merely a philosophical disaster. For them, there is no valid distinction between

Phenomenology and Ontology, as there is no valid distinction between phenomena (appearances) and noumena (essences). Therefore, there can be no bracketing of the world, no separation of subject and object or of object and object of consciousness. To do phenomenology is to give description of phenomena or appearances, and, therefore, to give descriptions of our being-in-the world. The world cannot be bracketed or doubted and there is no subject distinguishable and separable from the world; there is simply Dasein as being-in-the world. Dasein and being-in-the world are inseparable; they are the same phenomenon. There can be no talk of Dasein apart from its being-in-the world, and no sense to talk about the world apart from Dasein. Therefore, the traditional distinction between things as experienced and things as they are or between appearance and reality or between existence and essence finds no place in Heidegger's existential phenomenology.

Equivalent to Kierkegaard's 'crowd' and Nietzsche's 'herd', Heidegger coins a new term 'das Man' which represents an average everyday Dasein, who does not define himself uniquely but simply as a part of public. This rejection of the self is Dasein's fallenness, his inauthenticity, and his refusal to ask the question of Being. In das Man, Dasein becomes being-for-others instead of being-for-itself. In such condition Dasein is too much preoccupied with the petty tasks and concerns of everyday life to think about his Existenz or the Being. This fallen neglect of Existenz is the heart of inauthentic life, as Heidegger says, "This care of averageness reveals in term an essential tendency of Dasein which we call the "leveling down" (Einebnung) of all possibilities of Being" (*Being and Time* 127). He further stresses that most of Daseins strive throughout their lives to become das Man because it is easier to be mediocre than to be authentic and oneself.

Like other existentialists, Heidegger touches the morbid aspects of life, and death is one among them. For him, death is both Dasein's inner most possibility (as its recognition enables Dasein to see his freedom) and "the limit of Dasein's possibilities" (as after death there is no possibility of further freedom) (*Being and Time* 248). Dasein is, therefore, being-unto-death. For Heidegger, as for Kierkegaard, it is death which makes authenticity possible. The realization that one can die only one's own death always forces Dasein to see him apart from das Man.

Heidegger is often criticized for his gloomy view of human existence as being-unto-death. But it should be taken positively because, no doubt, death signalizes the end of our Existenz, but it, simultaneously, frees us from the tyranny of das Man. Solomon rightly says in his book, *From Rationalism to Existentialism*, "The prospect of this freedom is not a gloomy prospect at all . . . but is much more like Nietzsche's celebration of the 'awful truth' that "God is dead" (227).

Heidegger, throughout his life, has proclaimed himself as an atheist. But some people mistake his Being with that of Kierkegaard's God. However, they should not be blamed altogether, because the Heidegger, who, throughout in his difficult treatise *Being and Time*, talks about Dasein as the only entity who can approach Being, in his later writings makes his stand ambiguous by stating that Being is unapproachable even for Dasein. Being is no longer based on Dasein, but on an original mystery. Being is no longer for Dasein, but Dasein is for the sake of Being! He writes, "Man is only the persona, the mask of Being. . . . Being needs and uses the essence of man" (qtd. in Solomon 242). It is quite clear that in the later writings, Being has taken the place of the traditional transcendent Christian God.

It doesn't matter much whether Heidegger was an atheist or theist. But one thing is beyond a shadow of a doubt i.e. he has proved as a guide for the non-

religious, even anti-religious, humanistic existentialism which grew in the Nazi-occupied soul of France of whom Sartre was the prominent figure.

It was Jean-Paul Sartre (1905- 1980) who willfully accepted the label 'Existentialist' and laboriously made existentialism world famous after World War II. A soldier, who fought against Hitler, was captured in concentration camp, returned back to Paris, and again worked in the Resistance Movement, Sartre's philosophical as well as literature is the product of self-experiences. In 1940, Sartre was captured by German troops and he spent nine months as a prisoner of war in Nancy and finally in Stalag. It was during this period of confinement that Sartre read Heidegger's *Being and Time*, which consequently inspired him to write his phenomenological work *Being and Nothingness* (1943). The book is Sartre's masterpiece and explicitly explores existential motifs. His literary works like *Nausea* (1938), *The Wall* (1939), *The Flies* (1943), *No Exit* (1944), *The Age of Reason* (1945), etc. are full of existential themes, trying to exemplify his existential philosophy. *Existentialism is a Humanism* (1946) is a daring attempt on Sartre's part towards the foundation of humanistic existential ethics. However, Sartre later repudiated it as an unfortunate mistake.

Much influenced by Heidegger and Nietzsche, Sartre's existential pursuit of Being is an ontological, phenomenological, philosophical, psychological pursuit, before being an ethical one. Like Heidegger, Sartre rejects Husserl's subject-object dualism. Contrary to it, he believes in Heidegger's primitive notion of being-in-the world. He says:

Truth does not 'inhabit' only the 'inner man', or more accurately, there is no inner man, man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself. When I return to myself from an excursion into the realm of dogmatic common sense or of science, I find, not a source of

intrinsic truth, but a subject destined to be in the world. (qut. in Solomon 249).

For Sartre, there is no difference between the things as perceived and things as they are. That's why, he comments, “. . . we can equally reject the dualism of appearance and essence. The appearance does not hide the essence, it reveals it, it is the essence” (qtd. in Solomon 251).

A recurrent concept, prevalent in Heidegger, Kierkegaard, and Sartre, is the notion of ‘Nothing’ or ‘Nothingness’. Sartre opines that this is an important aspect of human existence. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger even goes to the extent of asking this question why there is something instead of nothing. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre equalizes the nothing to the all important concept of consciousness and, at last, to freedom. Nothingness is also related to Nietzsche's nihilation, which is an activity of negating. To make this concept clear, Sartre talks about consciousness as the formulation of perception and imagination. The only difference between a perceived thing and an imagined thing is that of ‘nothing’. While imagination involves a special act of nihilation, in perception, the object is characterized by its obtrusiveness – its resistance to nihilation. Sartre emphasizes the same and says, “I can say that the image includes a certain nothingness . . . however lively, touching or strong an image may be, it gives its object as not being” (*Imagination* 25). Therefore, imagination is the activity of consciousness to destroy, or ignore, or to go beyond its objects. The difference is not in the perceived or the imagined object of consciousness, but in the act or way of consciousness. In *Nausea*, the antihero, Antoine Roquentin, has a nauseating encounter with an object, the root of Chestnut tree. This encounter takes him towards the nothingness of his own being and of the whole human existence:

I was in the park just now. The roots of the Chestnut tree were sunk in the ground just under my bench. I couldn't remember it was a root any more. The words had vanished and with them the significance of things. . . . Then I had this vision. It left me breathless. Never, until these last few days, had I understood the meaning of "existence". . . . When I believed I was thinking about it, I must believe that I was thinking nothing, my head was empty, or there was just one word in my head, the word "to be". . . . (Sartre, *Nausea* 170-72)

But when he comes out of his imagination, his perception starts working. Resisting the nihilation, it makes him clear that "to exist is simply to be there. . . ." (Sartre, *Nausea* 177).

Sartre equalizes nothingness with consciousness and argues that nothingness is an activity of consciousness which itself is nothing, not only in the sense that consciousness is not an object for consciousness, but also in the sense that it is responsible for producing nothingness because "the being by which nothingness comes into the world must be its own nothingness" (*Being and Nothingness* 13).

Sartre explains, both in his essays on imagination and in his book *Being and Nothingness*, that nothingness is a component of our experience, a conscious and intentional activity of our consciousness, which distinguishes man from other beings by enabling him to annihilate, not only the object but even his own self, enabling him to be capable of withdrawing or wrenching away from the objects, and therefore, conceiving possibilities. In this sense nothingness ends up in freedom. Like Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Nietzsche, and other existentialists, Sartre believes in the uniqueness of human being among other entities. To differentiate between human being and other beings, Sartre uses two terms – 'being-in-itself' and 'being-for-itself'.

Being-in-itself has no Existenz of Heidegger. It is fulfilled and has no possibilities. It is simply there. Being-for-itself, on the other hand, is a being of possibilities. In this sense, man as being-in-itself is nothing more than an object like a stone while man as being-for-itself sees his possibilities and accepts a way ahead. Sartre says, “The for-itself is nothing but the pure nihilation of the in-itself” (*Being and Nothingness* 775-76). From the above discussion, it becomes clear that nothingness, consciousness, and freedom are interconnected.

Sartre explicitly discusses the notion of freedom throughout his *Being and Nothingness*. Freedom is the central notion or the starting point of existentialism. Man is free to choose, to choose to extinguish the Being or even to annihilate his own self. Therefore, freedom is Being and as nothingness is freedom, nothingness is also the essential structure of the being-for-itself. Sartre emphasizes, as did Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger, that this freedom is not merely a “faculty of the human soul”, a property of human being (*Being and Nothingness* 30). For Kierkegaard, human existence is freedom, for Heidegger, Dasein is Existenz, and in the same way, for Sartre, man is freedom:

. . . the essence of human being is suspended in his freedom. What we call freedom is impossible to distinguish from the being of “human reality”. Man does not exist first in order to be free subsequently; there is no difference between the being of man and his being free. (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* 30)

From this existentialist point, it follows that man is free to choose his intentions and actions, and is equally responsible for his choices. What differentiates man from all other beings is his freedom, and with this freedom (freedom of self-nihilation as well as nihilation of Being), man, and only man, can question Being.

Though the concept of freedom is pervasive throughout our previous study, it is Sartre whose central thematic concern is absolute freedom and its resultant absolute responsibility. For him, as for Heidegger, freedom is the defining structure of the for-itself or human consciousness, as he says, “What is at the very heart and center of Existentialism, is the absolute character of the free commitment, by which every man realizes himself . . .” (*Existentialism is a Humanism* 362). The same kind of reasoning is evident from Paul Tillich’s ideas when he argues, “Man is essentially . . . ‘freedom’: freedom not in the sense of indeterminacy but in the sense of being able to determine himself through decisions in the center of his being” (*The Courage to Be* 72).

It should be noted that Sartre’s radical freedom is not an exaggerated claim of absolute freedom, rather, his radical freedom is restricted by situation (facticity) in which the being is thrown without his choice. Therefore, freedom is limited by one’s facticity or situation; and freedom is absolute only within these limitations as he comments, “Our freedom does not destroy our situation, but gears itself to it” and “Man, as finite freedom, is free within the contingencies of his finitudes” (qtd. in Solomon 280). Thomas R. Flynn beautifully summarizes this idea when he says, “Less than angels, we are more than machines” (65). This idea of facticity can be explored through the given example – it is my facticity that I am a tall girl, doing Ph.D. in English from Central University of Haryana. Now, if I decide to be operated for shorten legs, decide to leave my research work unfinished and join another university, I am free to do this. But my decisions are originated by the facts of my being tall and being a research scholar in Central University of Haryana. Therefore, what Sartre wants to make clear is that that no doubt, we are abandoned (Heidegger’s ‘thrownness’) in a particular situation, we are totally free to make our intentions,

choices, and motives out of that particular situation. We are free to have transcendence (the freedom of consciousness as being-for-itself. In other words, human being is an ambiguous mixture of being-in-itself (facticity) and being-for-itself (transcendence)). Hence, absolute freedom does not mean that human beings are absolutely free to do what they want and get what they wish, but more reasonably, they are absolutely free to choose their own projects and impose their own interpretation on the situation in which they find themselves thrown or abandoned. Absolute freedom is freedom of choice, freedom of intention, freedom of signification, freedom of action, and not freedom of success in action. Sartre clarifies that “to be free does not mean “to obtain what one has wished” but rather “by oneself to determine oneself to wish” (in the broad sense of choosing). In other words, success is not important to freedom” (*Being and Nothingness* 591). Here, Sartre sounds like articulating the gist of the Bhagwad Gita, in which Krishna teaches Arjuna the lesson of *Karmayoga* and says:

कर्मण्येवाधिकारस्ते मा फलेषु कदाचन।

मा कर्मफलहेतुर्भूर्वा ते संगोऽस्तवकर्मणि॥

You have a right to perform your prescribed duty, but you are not entitled to the fruits of action. Never consider yourself the cause of the results of your activities, and never be attached to not doing your duty.

(Gitopanishad Bhagavad-Gita As It Is 121)

Both like Kierkegaard’s ‘angst’ and Heidegger’s ‘dread’, Sartrean ‘anguish’ is the result of the awareness of absolute freedom and its resultant responsibility. It is the recognition that “I am condemned to be free. This means that no limits to my freedom can be found except freedom itself or if you prefer, that we are not free to cease being free” (*Being and Nothingness* 537). As for Heidegger, dread is the prior

structure of Dasein, for Sartre, anguish is inevitable for human being, because it is from here that he further decides his path of either to be authentic (accepting one's possibilities as being-for-itself) or inauthentic (to live in Bad faith as being-in-itself).

Sartre has much stressed upon the concept of 'bad faith' in *Being and Nothingness*. Bad faith is the attempt to flee the anguish of freedom and responsibility. It can be compared with Heidegger's existential structure of fallenness, which is also the necessary tendency to escape freedom. However, where Heidegger implicitly defines fallenness as a retreat to the safe havens of average everydayness or *das Man* or public, Sartre's philosophical genius is best illustrated through his explicit analysis of bad faith through tremendous amount of examples.

Bad faith is a kind of self-deception in which man denies his absolute freedom and tries to be a thing. More accurately, it is constructing excuses to flee from responsibility. Solomon clearly defines this concept of bad faith and writes:

It is a willful refusal to recognize oneself as both facticity and transcendence, as a man with a past and a future yet to be determined. The paradigm case of bad faith is thus misinterpretation of choices which one makes for himself as facts which determine one. Bad faith is flight from anguish in the face of freedom, a denial of transcendence and the attempt to look at oneself as a thing. (293)

In other words, the one who practices bad faith is either hiding a displeasing truth or presenting a pleasing untruth as truth. Sartre talks about two forms of bad faith. One is the denial of one's transcendence and observing one's choices as facticity, by blaming internal causes like motives, desires, compulsions, temperament, passions etc. as well as outer social pressures. For example, the antisemite, in Sartre's "Portrait of the Antisemite", makes ungrounded excuses for his hatred for the Jews

and denies the opportunity to be transcended by coming out of this bad faith. Sartre writes about him and says, “By adhering to antisemitism, he is not only adopting an opinion, he is choosing himself as a person. He is choosing the permanence and impenetrability of rock . . . (“Portrait of the Antisemite” 345). While the antisemite, in a sense, blames his emotions and temperament for his being antisemite, the reality is that all our passions and emotions are chosen and not given. For example, if I say – I am a coward or a short tempered or a homosexual, what can I do about it, I am treating myself as a thing and not as a human being. The reason is that I am still free to be otherwise. No doubt, my cowardice or short-temperedness or homosexuality has become my facticity because of my past behavior. But as I am not dead and still can choose to be otherwise what I am.

One of the most prominent forms of bad faith is found in role-playing. It is accepting one’s role as decided by social requirements, and not by free and undetermined choice. This type of bad faith is famously illustrated in Sartre’s brilliant description of the Café waiter:

His movement is quick and studied, a little too precise, a little too rapid. . . . Finally there he returns, trying to imitate in his work the inflexible stiffness of some kind of automaton. . . . All this behavior seems to us a game. He is trying to link his movements together as if they were mechanisms, the one regulating the other. . . . He is playing with himself . . . he is playing at being a waiter in a café. . . . (*Being and Nothingness* 71-72)

Here, the waiter is attempting to be being-in-itself as well as being-for-others and denies his freedom of being-for-itself.

The other form of bad faith is to deny one's facticity and living in transcendence. For example, Garcin, in *No Exit*, has been a coward throughout his life. But after death (when all possibilities of transcendence have ended) he claims that he is not a coward and thus practices a peculiar form of bad faith. He, in death, refuses to face his facticity. Flynn gives a fantastic example of a student living in this type of bad faith;

. . . the student who insists that she is going to become a brain surgeon but who automatically reaches for the snooze button on her alarm rather than get out of bed to attend her chemistry class is acting in bad faith . . . she has chosen not to choose, . . . she is deceiving herself. She is living in bad faith. (74)

What Sartre thinks to live authentically is to live in good faith or sincerely by accepting one's self as both facticity and transcendence. He argues that acquiring this state of authenticity is a life-long effort which is almost impossible to achieve. The first thing to acquire this stage is to resist against bad faith which eventually can be done by first recognizing one's freedom and responsibility.

There is a specific and essential role of the other in a being's existence, and almost every existentialist asserts the essentiality of this other. Sartre uses the term being-for-others to define the relationship between the self and the other. In his views, other people are necessary as well as are a threat for the existence of the self, because it is the other people who turn a person into a fixed personality, into a definite thing. Therefore, ". . . the 'other' becomes the condition for my own existence . . ." as he says, and, "I cannot attain any truth about myself except through the mediation of the Other" (qtd. in Solomon 306). This theme permeates Sartre's novels and plays. In *No Exit*, Inez teases Estelle and says, "Suppose I covered my eyes and refused to look at

you, all that loveliness of yours would be wasted on the desert air” (Sartre, *No Exit and Other Plays* 21). Estelle says of her, after finding that there is no mirror in the room in Hell, “I feel so queer. (She pats herself) Don’t you ever feel that way too? When I can’t see myself I begin to wonder if I really exist, I pat myself just to make sure, but it doesn’t help” (Sartre, *No Exit and Three Other Plays* 19).

The same concern for being-for-others is captured by Simone de-Beauvoir in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, when she writes, “The individual defines himself only by his relation to the world and to other individuals” (218).

Talking about the other aspect of this relationship between the self and the other, Sartre opines that the other always tries to convert the self into a thing and thus mar its freedom. The same is tried by the self for the other. Therefore, this relation between ‘I’ and the ‘other’ is always that of conflict.

Excluding Kierkegaard, all the above discussed existentialists, somehow, reject the notion of the supreme power above man to direct him and provide him ultimate hope. But there is another name Karl Jaspers (1883-1969), the German psychiatrist, who, like Kierkegaard, talks about human existence and also about the ultimate truth of God. The inspiration for Jaspers’s existential theory seems to be taken from Kierkegaard. His philosophy of ‘Existenzphilosophie’ is not a doctrine but an outcome of a dissatisfaction of doctrines. Jaspers rejects the existentialist label as it suggests a school of thought, a doctrine among others, and a particular position.

Jaspers never devalues reason and logic but affirms the limitations of science and logic to define ultimate questions. He writes in his essay “On My Philosophy”:

We experience the limits of science as the limits of our ability to know and as limits of our realization of the world through knowledge and ability; the knowledge of science fails in the face of all ultimate

questions. . . . The failure of knowledge and the failure of communication cause a confusion in which Being and truth vanish. (167)

Like Sartre and others, Jaspers firmly accepts that man is not self-sufficient and he has to realize himself with the other. But Jaspers extends his other (which is other human being in Sartre) to the Deity and says that man's being is always related to the other "as Existenz to Transcendence" (168). He shifts the question "what is man?" to "what Transcendence (Deity) is. . . . Transcendence alone is the real Being . . . man himself is nothing, and what he is he is only in relation to the Deity" (169).

Therefore, Jaspers, however, maintains that man is the only being who can attain Existenz, but he equally stresses that man should devote himself in the Deity (Transcendence). For him, Transcendence is the ultimate hope for man if only he wants to come out of the nothingness of Nietzsche and Sartre.

As has been mentioned earlier, existentialism has its roots in the Oriental philosophy of Buddhism, which is assumed to be prevalent, many thousands of years back to our times, during 544 B.C.E. and 483 B.C.E. Siddhartha Gautama (Mahatma Buddha) was appalled by suffering and chaos in the world and as a result, he left his wife and son to meditate on the meaning of everything. He got Nibbana (enlightenment) after many years of meditation. No doubt, Mahatma Buddha shared the common beliefs of the time like belief in life-death circle, rebirth, gods, demons, heaven, hell etc. but, as Klostermaier writes in his book, *Buddhism: A Short Introduction*, "what made him different from his contemporaries was that he didn't consider any of these ultimately relevant" (29).

Buddha's teachings touch some of the basic concepts of existentialism. Like Sartre and others, he stresses upon freedom of choice and responsibility and shares,

“What we are is the fruit of what we have thought and done” (Klostermaier 31). Rejecting all outer sources of religion and philosophy as guide for man, Mahatma Buddha confirms, “The truly free person has found insight independently and has become his or her own source of understanding and action. . . . Self is the Lord of self; what higher Lord could there be?” (Klostermaier 69).

Kaufmann makes a contrast between Sartre and Buddha and assumes that the Buddha, like other atheist existentialists, does not believe in any supreme authority. Like Sartre and others, he believes in free choice and stresses upon despair and suffering. He opposes any reliance on the divine, because he wants men to realize their complete responsibility, as he says, “Workout your own salvation with diligence.” This thought of Mahatma Buddha seems to be rejuvenated in Sartre when he says, “All that we are is the result of what we have thought” (qtd. in Kaufmann, “Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre” 46).

Again, one can compare Buddha’s concept of wakefulness with that of Heidegger’s Being. Heidegger has repeatedly stressed upon the necessity of thinking about the Being which, in itself, is a heightened state of Dasein, acquired through observing personal freedom and living authentically. Buddha, in a similar tone, stresses upon the need of wakefulness because “wakefulness is the way to immortality; heedlessness is the way to death; those who are wakeful die not, the heedless are already dead” (Klostermaier 68).

To attain the heightened sense of Being or Nibbana or Enlightenment, Mahatma Buddha talks about observing eight-fold path of – right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right mode of living, right endeavor, right mindfulness, and right concentration. Here, the word ‘right’ can be observed as the existential word ‘authentic’, which is emphasized by almost every existentialist.

In spite of these similarities, Mahatma Buddha is often rejected by critics as an existentialist. Their argument is that Buddhist theory is a passive one which advises us to detach from the world, if we want to come out of the unsurpassable circle of suffering (*Dukkha*). It does not encourage us to rebel against the absurdity but to accept it passively. Kaufmann argues that there is a wide difference between Sartre and Buddha's philosophy. He says:

. . . it would be folly to paint Sartre in the image of the Buddha: he (Sartre) is not saintly but aggressively human; he does not preach disenchantment but commitment in the world; like Nietzsche, Sartre remains "faithful to the earth" and says, "Life begins on the other side of despair". ("Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre" 46)

But whatever the critics argue about Buddhist philosophy, I simply opine that it is not a passive philosophy rather it is more active than the modern existentialism. Mahatma Buddha never essentializes the idea of renouncing the world for the attainment of Nibbana. Even he himself couldn't attain the heightened sense of Nibbana through stoic observations. His Nibbana is a positive theory which supports the idea of detachment from the material world. His rebel is not with the world but with the 'self' which, even after realizing the absurdity and meaninglessness of the world, attaches itself with the transient worldly affairs and thus invites the invincible circle of *Dukkha*.

It is often said that every story has a moral. So, it is expected from existentialism also to give an ethical code. Though Sartre promises at the end of *Being and Nothingness* to write about existential ethics, but such work has never appeared. Again it would be paradoxical to entitle certain fixed values as existential values, because existentialism itself is a reaction against fixidity. Even to speak of the nature

of its ethics is misleading, since it implies a kind of essentialism, a perspective of objectivity which is foreign to authenticity. Existential ethics centers itself on the doctrine that there can be no ethics. However, there is a value which at once annihilates and embraces the essential. This value is freedom which obliterates all the 'ought' and embraces the 'ought' of free choice. Therefore, freedom is the ontological heart of existentialism; it is also its ethical foundation. Here, choices are good or bad, not according to what is being chosen but how it is being chosen (whether something is chosen in good faith or in bad faith). With this, free choice, authenticity, good faith, and responsibility (not only personal but social as well) come under the orbit of existential ethics. Kaufmann briefly summarizes the existential ethics and says:

After all, the existentialists have no desire simply to divert us. The story is the story of a protest and a challenge. Kierkegaard would have you become a Christian; Nietzsche says: "Be a man and do not follow me – but yourself!" Heidegger tries to arouse us from the oblivion of Being. And all of them contrast inauthentic life and authentic life. ("Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre" 50)

Albert Camus and the Question of Existence

Apart from the above mentioned names, who are either theists or atheists, there is one name, Albert Camus, who is neither a theist nor an atheist, but an agnostic; who wants to believe in the presence of God but doesn't have any evidence for that; who, time and again, denies any affiliation with existentialism but whose writings represent the basic features of existentialism. The French-Algerian novelist, playwright, essayist, and much more, Albert Camus was born in Mondovi, Algeria, on November 7, 1913 from Lucien Auguste Camus (French-Algerian) and Catherine Camus (Spanish). He lost his father when he was hardly of one year in "the Great War

. . . the great meat grinder of a generation of Frenchmen” (Lottman 17). Camus’s childhood passed (in poverty) in Belcourt where his mother had shifted to his maternal grandmother after his father’s death. Therefore, from the initials of his life, Camus was confronted with extreme poverty. But he realized that poverty mars dreams, no doubt, but never denies seeing dreams:

Poverty, first of all, was never a misfortune for me: it was radiant with light. To correct a natural indifference, I was placed halfway between poverty and the sun. Poverty kept me away from feeling that all was well under the sun and in history; the sun taught me that history was not everything. I wanted to change lives, yes, but not the world which I worshipped as divine. (Camus, “Preface, 1958” 7)

Brilliant in studies and sports, Camus’s doctoral studies were cut short by tuberculosis – the disease which tormented him throughout his life. His cultural and theatrical activities started with his involvement with a theatre group, *Theatre de l’Equipe* in 1937. His first book of essays *Betwixt and Between (L’Envers et l’endroit)*, was published on May 10, 1937. The next book, *Noces*, came in 1939. Camus’s esteem reached the heights with his books on the absurd – *Caligula* (play) (1938), *The Stranger* (novel) (1942), *The Myth of Sisyphus* (philosophical essay) (1943), and *The Misunderstanding* (play) (1944). His other famous novels include *The Plague (La Peste)*, published in 1947, *A Happy Death (La mort heureuse)*, published posthumously in 1972, *The First Man (Le Premier homme)*, published posthumously in 1994. Camus’s other essays of prominence are *The Rebel (L’Homme revolte)*, published in 1951, and *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death (1960)*. *The State of Siege (L’Etat de siege)* (1948), *The Just Assassins (The Justes)* (1949), and *The Possessed (Les Possedes)* (1959), are plays written by Camus.

Being concerned for humanitarian cause, Camus joined the Communist Party in 1935, but in 1937 was expelled from it because of his anti-colonial views which the Stalin regime took as an attack on its strength. During 1940s, all Europe was plunged into war and France fell to the Germans, who occupied the country and established the collaborationist Vinchy Government of Marshal Petain. In November 1942, Algeria was taken under control by the Allies forces and Camus was trapped in France. In late 1943, Camus joined the French Resistance and became active in the clandestine Resistance paper, the *Combat*, which he served both as an editor and a writer, not only during the occupation period, but also after the liberation of Paris in 1944. “Neither Victims nor Executioners” is a series of essays by Camus that were serialized in the *Combat* in November 1946. In 1957, the Swedish Academy awarded Camus the Nobel Prize for Literature and hailed him as “the world’s foremost literary antagonists of totalitarianism” (qtd. in Lottman 1). The *New York Times* editorial greeted the award by saying, “His is one of the few literary voices that has emerged from the chaos of the post-war world with the balanced, sober outlook of humanism” (qtd. in Lottman 1). On January 4, 1960, Camus was killed in a car accident.

Being a one-time friend of Sartre, Albert Camus is often put in the group of existential philosophers with Sartre. But this labeled-position is repeatedly rejected by Camus. In an interview with Jeanine Delpech for *Les Nouvelles Litteraires* (November 15, 1945), Camus exclaimed:

No, I’m not an existentialist. Sartre and I are always surprised to see our names linked. We have even thought of publishing a short advertisement in which the undersigned declare they have nothing in common with each other and refuse to be held responsible for the debts they might respectively incur. It’s a joke, actually. Sartre and I

published our books, without exception, before we had ever met. When we did get to know each other, it was to realize how much we differed. Sartre is an existentialist, and the only book of ideas that I have published, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, was directed against the so-called existentialist philosophers. Sartre and I do not believe in God, it is true. And we don't believe in absolute rationalism either. But neither does Jules Romains, Malraux, Stendhal, Paul de Kock, the Marquis de Sade, Andre Gide, Alexandre Dumas, Montaigne, or Moliere. . . . Must we put all these people in the same school? (Camus, "No, I am not an Existentialist" 345)

Somehow, like Nietzsche, Albert Camus never believed in any particular philosophy or in the omnipotence of any philosophy or system. During his tour to the U.S.A., answering the question about his philosophic position, Camus replied, "My philosophy is consisted of doubts and uncertainties. . . . I'm too young to have a 'system'" (qtd. in Lottman 378). In another interview, when Camus was asked if he was an existentialist, he replied that "he was not, because existentialism claims to answer all questions, which is impossible for a single philosophy, and he wanted the freedom to say yes as well as no" (Lottman 391).

Tired of being labeled as a philosopher of the absurd and an existentialist, Camus expressed his irritation and replied to Dorothy Norman, another interviewer, who asked about his affinity with existentialism, "you can explain nothing by way of principles and ideologies" (qtd. in Lottman 393).

In his *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus presents a fantastic critique of existentialism (especially theistic existentialism). He says, "I see that all of them [the existentialists] without exception suggest escape. Through an odd reasoning, starting

out from the absurd over the ruins of reason, in a closed universe limited to the human, they deify what crushes them and find reason to hope in what impoverishes them. (35)

He goes to the extent of criticizing existential attitude as a “philosophical suicide” (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 43). He criticizes the theistic existentialists (including Chestov, Kierkegaard, and Jaspers), because, first, defying all reason and logic, they see the world meaningless and incomprehensible; but later, they find it logical and reasonable to take a “leap into faith” and giving the incomprehensible the name of God! It seems absurd and ridiculous to “start from a philosophy of the world’s lack of meaning” and then to “end up by finding a meaning and depth in it” (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 44). Again, he makes his position clear by stressing that in spite of having the world meaningless, incomprehensive, and absurd; he is ready to accept the reality of this bleak truth but can never enhance the absurd for the sake of hope or grace from the unknown God. Camus is also critical of Sartrean “leap into faith” in the historical realism (qtd. in Charlesworth 45).

However critical of existentialism Camus is, there is no denying the fact that he is the child of his times. Being grown up in the atmosphere of poverty and the war-ridden era, Camus shares some of the basic ideas prevailing in the existential group of Sartre. Like other existentialists, Camus believes in the incomprehensiveness of the world and likewise, in man’s integrity and his ability to confront with this absurdity. He rejects the validity of any higher Transcendence which can lift man from the circle of the absurdity. Contrary to it, he inputs his full faith into human being and his ability to revolt against the absurd. Again, like Nietzsche, Sartre, Kierkegaard, and other existentialists, Camus rejects all the traditional philosophies which talk about general and universal truths decided by the Supreme. Contrary to it, Camus puts his sole faith

in the truth of the individual- creating his/her self without the blessings of the Other (God). The idea echoes in *The Myth of Sisyphus* when he declares, “I don’t know whether this world has a meaning that transcends it. But I know that I do not know that meaning and that it is impossible for me just now to know it. What can a meaning outside my condition mean to me? I can understand only in human terms” (51). He further asserts in the same confidence, “I do not want to find anything on the incomprehensible. I want to know whether I can live with what I know and with that alone” (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 42).

Like Sartre, for Camus also, man is not a thing like a stone which is ‘being-in-itself’. Contrary to it, man is an ongoing procedure, a being-for-itself, becoming every moment by defining his freedom in making choice and taking responsibility.

The question of the other is much discussed, both in *Being and Time* and *Being and Nothingness*. Likewise, Camus finds man in the midst of the world as being-in-the world. The other, for Camus (as is for Sartre) is both a necessity and a threat. In *The Fall*, Clemence is obsessed with the self given to him by others – the self of a noble man, a ladies’ man, or a generous man etc. Meursault, in *The Stranger*, is a stranger for others, primarily, because of his peculiar ability to ignore the looks of others. But towards the end of the book, during his trial, he, first time seems to be affected by the others. He contemplates, “It was then that I noticed a row of faces in front of me. They were all looking at me” (83); and “for the first time in years I had this stupid urge to cry, because I could feel how much all these people hated me . . . and for the first time I realized that I was guilty” (90). In this way, it is not one’s condition which realizes him/her of hell but hell is other people.

It is clear from the above discussion that Camus shares the prevailing existentialistic ideas of time. But once more, he himself rejects this label and

considers this similarity of his ideas with the Sartrean-group as merely the consequence of their sharing the same country with same era. In an interview to a local newspaper, *Diario*, Camus replies with visible irritation:

It is a serious error to treat with such frivolity a philosophical research as serious as existentialism. Its origins go back to Saint Augustine and its chief contribution to knowledge certainly resides in the impressive wealth of its method. Existentialism is above all a method. The similarities that one generally remarks between Sartre's work and my own come naturally from the chance or the misfortune that we have to live in the same era and in confrontation with common problems and concerns. (qtd. in Lottman 470)

But in spite, despite, respite of his thorough rejection, Camus has been effortlessly proved as an existentialist by many critics (and somehow, they are right if existentialism is taken in its appropriate sense). In her book, *Camus and Sartre*, Germaine Bree summarizes:

Camus remained more consistently faithful to Existentialism – at least of that's interpreted as an emphasis upon the personal, the subjective, the concrete – than did Sartre with his commitment to doctrinaire Marxism. . . . There was no theorist's system he [Camus] wanted to communicate to others. It was of the one-sidedness of doctrinaire ideologies that he was critical. (qtd. in Charlesworth 40)

Another critic, Stephen Eric Bonner, in his book *Camus: Portrait of a Moralist*, observes a similarity between Camus's ideas and that of the other existentialists. He writes:

Existentialism is a loose term. It reflects a certain current of European culture as well as a philosophical response to metaphysical idealism and materialism. Camus's work is part of this current and his thinking part of the same response to these dominant philosophical trends. It gives primacy to the "lived life" of the individual; it emphasizes the "meaning-giving act" as did Husserl; it makes reference to a paradox and the "divorce" within reality as did Kierkegaard and Kafka; it highlights the "extreme situation" as did Jaspers; it deals with inauthenticity and seeks to offer an authentic way of responding to the experiences of anxiety (angst), the absurd, and death; and it is preoccupied with what Simone de Beauvoir termed "the solitary man".

(47)

The assessment of the above mentioned critics is not wrong. But Camus is much more than an existentialist. Thomas Hanna alleviates Camus from the others and opines that unlike Sartre and Heidegger, he doesn't leave us alone in the midst of the gloomy atmosphere of nothingness rather he has found the way of salvation. Hanna writes, ". . . he has set up the land marks for a positive humanism. . . . [Though] his thought seems to move in the same channels as that of Heidegger, Jaspers, or Sartre, but at its terminus it reveals its positive features and its substantially different character" (5-6).

While other existentialists seem to kneel down before the absurd (e.g. Sartre seems to do the same in *No Exit* when Garcin says at the end of the play, "Well, well, let's get on with it . . .") (*No Exit and Other Plays* 24), Camus takes up arms against it by putting his sole faith in man's ability to revolt against the absurd. He is not satisfied to remain at the absurd-threshold; rather absurd is the starting point to

construct the positive scenario which is much needed in the war-trodden world. He clarifies his point by saying, “If we assume that nothing has any meaning, then we must conclude that the world is absurd. But does nothing have any meaning? I have never believed we could remain at this point” (Camus, “Encounter with Albert Camus” 356). More than an existentialist, he is a rebel and a moralist who is not in the mood of sacrificing his humanitarian attitude at the stake of dry and abstract ideology as both Heidegger and Sartre did: Heidegger by embracing Fascism, and Sartre by embracing Marxism. Sartre, even, assumes Marxism as the realization of existentialism. He writes in “Marxism and Existentialism”, “. . . I consider Marxism the one philosophy of our time which we cannot go beyond and . . . I hold the ideology of existence and its “comprehensive” method to be an enclave inside Marxism, which simultaneously engenders it and rejects it. . . ” (369). Hence, the absurd fails to corrupt Camus as he never tries to seek escape in absolute doctrines. Justin O’Brien, in the Introduction of *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, escalates the same idea and states, “By overcoming the immature nihilism and despair that he saw as poisoning our century, he immersed as the staunch defender of our positive moral values . . .” (v). Moreover, if existentialism is not an abstract doctrine, merely bombastic about freedom and responsibility in black and white, but a theory of action, then Camus is the rarest existentialist. He is the only voice who believes – not in the absurd God, but in “. . . a total absence of hope (which has nothing to do with despair), a continual rejection (which must not be confused with renunciation), and a conscious dissatisfaction (which must not be compared to immature unrest)” (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 34).

The following chapters are planned in the same line of thought process. In the second chapter i.e. ‘Absurd: A Reality of the World’, the concept of the absurd is

planned to be discussed in considerations with the three absurds – the philosophical essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*; the novel, *The Stranger*; and the play, *Caligula*. Chapter third i.e. ‘Revolt: A Wager Against the Absurd’, will be an answer to the absurd, elaborating the concept of revolt through the articles published under the title, “Neither Victims nor Executioners”; the novel, *The Plague*; and the essay, *The Rebel*. The fourth chapter, ‘Camus and the World of His Vision’, is planned to discuss Camus’s vision of a democratic world which is free from totalitarianism, colonialism, and death penalty. The final chapter will be that of ‘Conclusion’.

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