

I

INTRODUCTION

The Overview of the Play

Edward Albee, one of the most prominent American dramatists, undoubtedly holds an outstanding place beside Eugene O' Neil, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller. Albee was abandoned soon after his birth in Virginia, on March 12, 1928, by his parents and was adopted in infancy by Reed and Frances Albee, part-owners of the Keith-Albee Theater Circuit. Albee expresses no bitterness towards his adoptive parents; however, he has acknowledged a deep-seated resentment against his natural parents for abandoning him.

It is certain that later the same circumstance became influential in the career he adopted and left an unmistakable mark upon his writing: often with the themes of the family, adoption and childlessness. Albee's deep-seated resentment of the natural parents who abandoned him finds reflection in the child motifs that pervade both his original plays and his adaptations. Alienation and conflict: these for him were the dominant themes of his early experience as well as later phase of his writing.

Albee is often known as the chief practitioner of the absurd in drama. Broadway entered a new era with the arrival of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962), his masterpiece play which represents a concentrated satirical attack on the American myth of perfection of ideals, its families, its progress. Albee created part of the excitement with a shift away from the psychological realism of Miller and Williams towards a more abstract mode of expression identified by Martin Esslin 'the theatre of the absurd'. However, he has reluctantly identified himself an eclectic, with dramatic roots extending as deeply into the plays of Anton Chekhov and Eugene O' Neil into those of Samuel Beckett and Tennessee Williams.

The present play *A Delicate Balance* first published in 1966. It won the Pulitzer Prize in 1967 and achieved Tony Award for best revival of a play in 1996. The play opened in New York City on September 12, 1966, at the Martin Beck Theatre, and The Lincoln Center Theatre production of the play opened in New York City on April 21, 1996, at the Plymouth Theatre. The three-act play is set in the library-living room of a large and well-appointed suburban house. The topic of the play sounds something delicate but there's nothing delicate, of course, about the topics or emotions raised by the play.

Albee's *A Delicate Balance* concerns with the hidden terrors that lurk just beneath the surface of seemingly placid everyday life. He examines illusion and loss in American families through the play that stood as a dark comic portrait of modern angst. The parable of modern existence and the American ethos find a common articulation in Albee's concern with illusion and loss in the play. With substantial theatrical force, Albee has brought into focus, the pointless and absurdity of the human situation. It reveals the emotional savagery suburbia and the psychological terror of empty lives. A middle-aged couple's struggle to restore the "balance" of their routine after it has been threatened by intruding friends is central in the play. The characters attempt to maintain a delicate balance between self-destruction and survival when a bitter 36-year-old daughter returns home to the family nest after the collapse of her fourth marriage. The much wed Julia shatters the uneasy peace of her long-married parents, Agnes and Tobias, and their permanent guest – acerbic, unpredictable, and witty alcoholic sister-in-law, Claire. When two lifelong friends gate-crash this impromptu reunion, the masks of civility drop and raw feelings emerge.

His plays generally deal with people's attempts to make sense for themselves of their senseless position in a senseless world. The research work attempts to analyze the parodic nature of existential terror that has completely haunted the modern people.

Where the characters in the play suffer from the absence of their existential peace so much that the friendship between the two couples even gets affected by the nameless terror: the terror is the existential terror that haunts them so much that they see their lives empty, void and of nothingness. The research work is the testing of a tentative hypothesis that the parodic dramatization of the haunting existential terror of the modern people in the play makes a point that the obsessed inclination to the existence itself creates terror and existential crisis.

The characters in the play suffer so much from the nameless dread that haunts them ceaselessly like a ghost. Their repetitive routine is not only absurd but also becomes a parody that mocks their “fear” at the core of their existence. The concept of parody here could be a help for further analysis.

Concept of Parody

Parody, as a literary term, is a composition that ridicules another composition by imitating and exaggerating aspects of its content, structure, and style, accomplishing in words what the caricature achieves in drawing (caricature is description of character that exaggerates traits of appearance or personality for comic effect). Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms defines parody as “a mocking imitation of the style of a literary work or works, ridiculing the stylistic habits of an author or school by exaggerated mimicry” (185).

Parody is related to burlesque, an incongruous imitation; it is a variety of high burlesque that deflates the original by applying the imitation to a lowly or comically inappropriate subject. Parody is related to burlesque in its application of serious styles to ridiculous subjects, to satire in its punishment of eccentricities, and even to criticism in its analysis of style. The Greek dramatist Aristophanes parodied the styles of Aeschylus and Euripides in *Don Quixote* (1605). In English, two of the leading parodists are Henry Fielding and James Joyce. Poets in the 19th century, especially

William Wordsworth and Robert Browning, suffered numerous parodists of their works. John Phillips's *The Splendid Shilling* (1705) parodied the style of Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), and similarly, Samuel Richardson's novel *Pamela* (1740) was parodied by Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrus* (1742).

Parody is taken of as imitation, intended to ridicule or to criticize. Definitions of parody, sometimes, become confusing: when one authority defines parody as a form of burlesque, and others consider burlesque a form of parody. So, it may be essential to evaluate parody in terms of ironic and satiric features. Roger J. Kreuz and Richard M. Roberts in *On Satire and Parody: The Importance of Being Ironic* discriminate between the concept of irony, satire and parody. They argue that satire and parody are literary genres, whereas irony is not; that is a complex rhetorical device sometimes used by these genres. They emphasize on echoic mention as an integral part of parody. Putting their words thus:

Both parody and satire can be described in terms of three features of irony: pretense, echoic mention, and the maintenance of multiple mental representations. We suggest that pretense is an important part of satire and that echoic mention is an important part of parody. Such discriminations are useful because distinctions among text genres appear to have psychological significance. (97)

The effective of a parody knows his or her subject well; however, the parodist does not need to affect a pretension of ignorance. In fact, the parodist makes his or her familiarity with the original work obvious. To be effective, the parody criticizes or flatters. Beard and Kenny's *Bored of the Rings*, as its title implies, mocks the length of J.R.R. Tolkien's trilogy and the reverence in which many hold it.

Parody is similar to sarcasm in that statements are made that are contrary to fact. In parody, however, the entire subject is treated in a contradictory manner; "elevated"

subjects are debased, and “lowly” subjects are elevated. Although echoic mention and multiple representations are hallmarks of both irony and parody, parody can be accomplished without irony. Because parody relies on an approximation to an original source, it can be considered an instance of echoic mention with the irony removed.

There is possibility for a satire also to be a parody; but at least three simultaneous representations should be kept in mind: a representation of the events in the text itself, a representation of how the events in the text imitate the original work, and a representation of how the events in the text have implications both beyond the text and beyond the original work (104). An example of a parodic satire is John Stuart’s *A Modest Proposal* (1968). The satire is effective even without an understanding of the parody; however, the parody cannot be effective without an understanding of Swift’s satiric work. When satire and parody function together within the same work, they achieve their unique goals independent of each other. A parodic satire would be the same as a satiric parody, however, satire and parody are not the same genre. But satire and parody do not require irony. Irony is not a necessary feature of satire and parody.

One way of creating double or contradictory stance on any statement is the use of parody: citing a convention only to make fun of it. Linda Hutcheon explains, “Parody-- often called ironic quotation, pastiche, appropriation, or intertextuality--is usually considered central to postmodernism, both by its detractors and its defenders” (Modules on Hutcheon). Andreas Hofele in his critical paper *Oscar Wilde, or, The Prehistory of Postmodern Parody* asserts that parody has acquired the reputation of being the postmodern art form par excellence because its double-coded structure is ideally suited to effect such blending of Romanticism and modernism. He defines parody as “the knowing grin: a strategy of double-coded discourse ‘shap[ing] itself around its own dissolvent’, signaling difference at the heart of similarity, distinguished

from mere imitation through a display of metatextual awareness encapsulated in a gesture of comic distancing” (140). Jameson considers postmodern parody as a symptom of the age. Hofele attacks Jameson lacking comic element and the awareness from contemporary parody in his sweeping critique of postmodern culture. He adds what poses as parody nowadays, Jameson claims, is therefore merely a weak, much diluted ersatz of the genuine article. For Hutcheon, parody de-doxifies; it unsettles all doxa, all accepted beliefs and ideologies, it both legitimizes and subverts, in doubly coded political terms, that which it parodies.

Literature Review

Right from the date of its first publication Albee's *A Delicate Balance* has attracted the attention of many critics. Its richness is reflected in its criticism from multiple perspectives.

One of the renowned critics Thomas P. Adler points out the female roles in Albee's play. He posits that:

Agnes not only has no desire for self-knowledge but also deliberately guards against any diagnosis of the family's ills. As the fulcrum, she is able to maintain the family's status quo only by keeping herself and Tobias in condition of stasis, insulated from the currents that threaten to upset the "delicate balance" that allows them to go on without ever questioning the assumptions. A somewhat haughty though gracious woman, whose high artificial and carefully measured language reflects the controlled pattern of her existence and her inability to tolerate or handle the unexpected, Agnes muses frequently on sex roles. (12)

Allan Pero, who boasts of developing a new perception, asserts, "Edward Albee's *A Delicate Balance* has been read variously as a play about responsibility, a play about friendship, a play about a crisis of (usually American) masculinity, and a

play exploring the 'source' of that crisis (regrettably, that most usual of aspects), Woman herself. It has been less often read as a text that explores the problem of melancholy's relation to desire and the labyrinth of choices that informs that problem (174)".

Another notable critic Jill B. Gidmark mentions the common themes of Albee's plays viz. communication, existentialism, family and family life, fear, houses, mansions, or manor, parents and children, sub-urban life. He says:

Like most of Edward Albee's plays, *A delicate Balance* has a domestic focus, and, like those in most of his plays, the family here is mired in failed relationships and numbed sensitivities, full of vital lies that must tell to protect themselves from who they really are. The characters seem mediocre, if not stable. Actions run smoothly, without any raw or especially violent confrontation. A veneered surface of civility masks the terror of nothingness beneath it. It is a clichéd portrait of 'ideal' life in the suburbs--affection and no reality. (88)

Eventhough some of the critics criticized the play for repeating the structure and thematic context of his earlier play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* (1962), Michael Feingold easily accepts the use of empty forms that Albee thrashes sardonically in the play to make it the better play, and he further comments on his script, "At various points annoying, heart-rending, and wryly, raucously funny, Albee's script is always something of a private mystery, coolly keeping its distance from the spectators, placidly working itself out through half-parodic lofty language, while nothing seems to happen and few tangible topics are broached (75)".

Another critic William Hutchings focuses him in describing the dramatic devices particularly on Places discussion.

Agnes and Tobias's home. Home of a married couple whose living room

is the setting for the entire play. Edward Albee's stage directions describe the set as contains a library, chairs, a supply of liquor bottles, and an arched entryway. Albee provides remarkably few other details about the set, but the fact that the room is 'well-appointed' indicates that it should reflect its residents' affluences, class, and taste. (43)

In this way, different critics have given their views about Edward Albee's plays and especially *A Delicate Balance* in distinct ways. Unlike them, my concern here will be to show how the parodic dramatization of the haunting existential terror becomes the major issue in the drama.

II

WHAT IS EXISTENTIALISM?

Introduction

'Existentialism' as a philosophical movement or tendency came into prominence particularly in Germany and France after the two great World Wars. This modern system of belief started with opposing the doctrine that viewed human beings as manifestation of an absolute value. Precisely, because of the nuclear holocaust of the Second World War, the certainties and scientific reasoning that ruled nineteenth centuries smashed into fragments, and further proving that human rationality no more worked. The wars gave rise to the feelings of despair and separation from the established order. Anxiety, absurdity and uncertainty ruled the fragmented world whereas the old concepts like unity, rationality, Christianity faded. Then the terrified western people began to think the role and activities of individual; the wide spread feeling of despair and separation led to the idea that people have to create their own values in the world in which the traditional values no longer reign. Existentialism insists that choices have to be made arbitrarily by individuals, who thus create themselves, as there are no objective standards to determine choice. It draws attention to the risk, the void of human reality and admits that the human being is thrown into the world in which pain, frustration, sickness, contempt, malaise and death dominate. It insists on concrete individual existence, freedom and choice.

Meaning of Existentialism

Existentialism is a school of thought devoted to the interpretation of human existence. Etymologically, the term "existence" is derived from the Latin root ex

“out” + *sistere* from *stare* “to stand” (Cuddon 316). In this sense, existence means to stand out in universe; existentialism means “pertaining to existence”. It takes human being as an isolated existent into an alien universe.

Existentialism is a set of philosophic ideals that stress the existence of the human being, the anxiety and depression which pervade each human life (Lavine 322). It is less of an ‘-ism’ than an attitude that expresses itself in a variety of ways. Because of the diversity of positions associated with Existentialism, no single strict definition is possible; however it suggests one major theme: the stress on concrete individual human existence. Ryan posits:

Hence there is no single existentialist philosophy, and no single definition of the word can be given. However, it may be said that with the existentialists the problem of man is central and that they stress man’s concrete existence, his contingent nature, his personal freedom, and his consequent responsibility for what he does and makes himself to be. (639)

Existentialists really concern to the problem of man. They focus on man’s concrete existence, his personal freedom and his responsibility for his choice.

Existentialism is a revolt against traditional philosophy which seeks objective and universal truth. The existentialists do not go with the traditional attempt to get the ultimate nature of the world in abstract systems of thought. Instead, they search for what it is like to be an ‘individual’ human being in the world, whether the thing is true or false, that depends on the decision the individual makes; what is true to one may be false to another. So, truths are subjective according to existentialism. Sartre defines existentialism as “a doctrine which makes human life possible and, in addition,

declares that every truth and every action implies a human setting and a human subjectivity”. (*Existentialism and Human Emotions* 10)

Existentialists conclude that human choice is ‘subjective’ because individuals finally make their own choices without help from such external standards as laws, ethical rules, or traditions. Because individuals make their own choices, they are ‘free’, but because they freely choose, they are completely ‘responsible’ for their choices. Every person is compelled to make a choice. Macintyre says, “Even if I do not choose, I have chosen not to choose” (149).

The existentialists emphasize that freedom is necessarily accompanied by responsibility. Sartre views, “man is condemned to be free”. Condemned, because he did not create himself, yet, in other respect is free; because, once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does (23). We may use the following illustration to clarify Sartre’s view:

We are like actors who suddenly find themselves on stage in the middle of a performance, but without having a script, without knowing the name of the play or what role they are playing, without knowing what to do or say-yes, without even knowing whether play has an author at all--whether it is serious or a farce. We must *personally* make a decision, to *be* something or other – a villain or a hero, ridiculous or tragic. Or we can simply exist, immediately. But that is also choosing a role – and that choice, too is made without our ever knowing what the performance was about. (Skirbekk and Gilje 444)

The fundamental problem of existentialism is concerned with Ontology, the study of being. The human being’s existence is the first and basic fact; the human being has no essence that precedes existence. The human being as a being is nothing.

The nothingness and the non-existence of an essence is the central source of the freedom the human being faces in each and every moment. He has liberty in view of his situation and in decisions that make him solve his problems and live in the world happily.

Basically, existence can be categorized as: authentic and inauthentic (being-in-itself). The authentic being is only rarely attained by humans still it is what humans just strive to gain. The inauthentic is characteristically distinctive of things; it is what the human being is diseased with for his failure to act as a free agent and his impotency to reject bad faith. Things are only what they are. But the human being is what can be. Things are determined, fixed, and rigid whereas the human being is free because he can add essence in the course of his life, and he is in a constant state of flux and able to comprehend his situation. The human being does not live in a predetermined world; the human being is free to realize his aims and his dreams. Hence, he had only the destiny he forges for himself because in this world nothing happens out of necessity.

Existentialism has had an enormous influence outside philosophy, on, for example psychology (Jaspers, Ludwig Binswanger, R.D. Laing) and although it is compatible with atheism (Heidegger, Sartre), as well as with Christianity (Kierkegaard, Marcel) – on theology (Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, Rudolf Buttman). Existentialism as such entails no particular political doctrines, but its stress on responsibility and its aversion to conformation and to whatever impairs human freedom can be conducive to political activism (Sartre). (*New Encyclopedia Britannica* 347)

The human being disguises himself from freedom by self-deception, acting like a thing, as if he were a passive subject, instead of realizing the independent being as a pure human, which is an illusive faith. In such faith, human being shelters himself

from responsibility by not noticing the dimension of alternative courses of action. The human being behaves as others demand of him by confronting to the standards of accepted values and by adopting roles designed for him. If so, the human being imprisons himself within inauthenticity and unreal for he has refused to take the challenge of responsibility and the anxiety that comes along with his freedom.

Existentialist philosophers take existence as the first and central problem. They opine that the metaphysical explanation of existence as given by traditional school of philosophy failed to produce satisfactory result. Being contrasts not only with knowing, but also with abstract concepts, which cannot fully capture what is individual and specific. They also maintain that the problem of being ought to take precedence in all philosophical inquiry. Existence is always particular, unique and individual. Being cannot be made a topic of objective study. Being is revealed and felt by the human being through his own experience and his situation.

In short, Existentialism is more than a fashionable intellectual idea, to be played with by lively minds: it is a philosophy born out of the anguish of our time and the emptiness due to our lost and shattered faiths.

History of Existentialism

As a self-conscious movement Existentialism is primarily a 20th-century phenomenon, embracing Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Jean-Paul Sartre, Gabriel Marcel, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, but its characteristic features occur earlier, especially, in the 19th-century thinkers Friedrich Nietzsche and Soren Kierkegaard. Edmund Husserl and W.F. Hegel, though not Existentialist, are major influences. (*New Encyclopedia Britannica* 348). The elements of existentialism can be found even in the thought of Socrates, in the Bible, and in the work of many pre-modern philosophers and writers. In fact, Existentialism goes back to man's pre-historical

attempts to attain self-awareness and understanding of existence, the world around us. The connection of being and thinking was Greek insight and it is this very insight that the modern existentialists are trying to re-establish. The ancient Greek thought was revolutionized by Socrates who shifted the attention of the study of philosophy from Nature to Man, man at the centre of existence. The problem of what man is in himself can be perceived in the Socratic imperative “know thyself”, as well as in the work of Montaigne and Pascal, a religious philosopher and mathematician (*New Encyclopedia* 612). Jostein Gaarder in *Sophie’s World* says:

Socrates, whose mother was a midwife, used to say that his art was like the art of the midwife. She does not herself give birth to the child, but she is there to help during its delivery. Similarly, Socrates saw his task as helping people to ‘give birth’ to the correct insight, since real understanding must come from within. It cannot be imparted by someone else. And only the understanding that comes from within can lead to true insight. (65)

The main ideas of existentialist theory were already common to religious thought when existentialism was first introduced (the idea of man being responsible for his own actions, and so on). Most religious thought is existentialist by definition. Existentialist roots have been traced back to Pascal and St. Augustine. The subjectivism of theologian St. Augustine during the 4th-5th century exhorted man not to go outside himself in the quest for truth, for it is within him that truth abides (612). Jostein Gaarder comments, “He did not deny that we have free will” (178). St. Augustine affirmed the existence of human ego in the soul. He gave importance to the individual self.

The existential trace can be found in the works of Montaigne as well. Why does Montaigne write about himself, rather than handling any other issues? The answer is: he assigns importance to the self. In this reference, Charles Van Doren in *History of Knowledge* remarks:

Montaigne makes no attempt to conceal his faults, but he does not beat his breast, either, and demand forgiveness. He is content to report what he is, what he thinks, what he feels ... Montaigne sought to reach beyond his own illusions, to see himself as he really was, which is not just the way other saw him. (144-45)

Montaigne in his *Essays* reveals with utter honesty and frankness the author's mind and heart. He makes the exploration of his self.

Existentialism is often seen as a revolt against traditionalist philosophy. It contradicts Descartes' views that man is open to the world and the objects in it without intermediary stratum of ideas or sensations. Also, there is no distinct realm of consciousness on which one might infer, project, or doubt the existence of external objects. Existentialists are concerned with being rather than with knowing: this is a rejection of Cartesian dualism.

Existentialism as a distinct philosophy began with the Danish Christian thinker Soren Kierkegaard in the first half of the nineteenth century. He criticized Hegel's philosophical system as being abstract and having nothing with human existence. He advocated that the irrational is the real against Hegelianism. In addition, he discussed man's essence with the existential predicaments and limitations: hope, despair, anxiety and so on. The bitter truth with Hegel that he became one of the major influences for existential movement is not because of his any concrete contribution for it, but mainly by virtue of reaction against him.

Although the classic forms of Existentialism are characteristic of post-World War II philosophy, literature and art, the ideas were anticipated long before: there were real existentialists before that. The most important was certainly Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). There were at least three ways in which Nietzsche qualifies as classic Existentialist, all of which we can see in what may have been his magnum opus, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1885). Nietzsche focused precisely on the non-existence of all value in one of the most famous sayings in the history of philosophy, 'God is dead', and Nietzsche's replacement of God is the Übermensch (Superman). When Nietzsche says 'man' (Mensch), he means someone egotistical, brawling, aggressive, arrogant, and insensitive. The Superman is not vulnerable to taming and domesticity. Secondly, he is free because all his own values flow from his own will. Value is a matter of decision, a matter of will. Because the superman, in whom we find the triumphant 'will to power' is free, he takes what he wants and does he likes. He is authentic. The third point, which is advanced as the greatest teaching of Zarathustra, does the same job as Sartre's redefinition of 'responsibility'. This is the 'Eternal Recurrence'. Since every point where a time like the present has happened, or will happen, itself also has an eternity of time before it, then what is happening now has already happened an infinite number of times and will happen an infinite number of times again.

The development of modern existentialism was preceded by the works of the German phenomenologist Frenz Brento (1838-1917), and Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). They were immediately followed by the modern existentialists: German existentialism was represented by Martin Heidegger (1889-1979) and Karl Jaspers (1883-1969), French existentialism by Jean-Paul Sartre(1905-1980), Spanish by Jose Ortego Y. Gasset (1883-1955), and Italian existentialism by Nicola Abbagnano (b.

1910). The most forceful voice of existentialist thought were the works of the French existentialists: Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir (1908-86), and Albert Camus (1913-60). No one has contributed more to the popularization of existentialism of philosophical trend than Sartre. The Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-1881) and Austrian Jewish writer Franz Kafka (1883-1924) contributed significantly in the literary trend of the doctrine. Dostoyevsky in his novels presented the defeat of man in the face of choices and the result of their consequences, and, finally in the enigmas of himself. Kafka in his novels like *The Castle* (1926) and *The Trial* (1925) presented isolated men confronting cast, elusive, menacing bureaucracies. In the art, the analogues of Existentialism may be considered to be Surrealism, Expressionism, and in general those Schools that view the role of art not as reflection of objective and external reality to man but as the free projection of the human being. (*New Encyclopedia* 613). An important aspect of the existentialist movement was its popularization due to the ramification of existentialist philosophy in literature, psychology, religion, politics, and culture. Existentialism made its entrance into psychology through Karl Jaspers' *Allgemeine Psychopathologie* (1913), which was inspired by the need to understand the world in which the mental patient lives, by means of a sympathetic participation in his experience (613). Christian existentialism, inspired by Kierkegaard, is a creed of its own kind. Camus's semi-philosophical essays won sympathizers.

Phenomenology and Ontology have had remarkable influences on Existentialism. Sartre and Heidegger were disciples of the founder of Phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, and Sartre himself, somewhat younger, was then influenced by Heidegger. Skirbekk and Gilje define phenomenology in this way:

Phenomenology aims to describe the everyday items that we use, as they appear to us: the pencil with which I am now writing is described as it is in this context. Phenomenology attacks the view that the pencil is only a collection of atoms. In this sense, we can say that this school aims to reconstruct the universe in all of its diversity and fullness, with all of its qualities, as opposed to a one-dimensional standardization based on scientific philosophy. (440)

Phenomenology and Existentialism, though combined together by Heidegger and Sartre, have their own independent identity and are two branches of continental philosophy. The 'life-world' concept, the world in which we live with its everyday articles and its ideas as they appear to the users, of Husserl is the idea of immediacy. It is an idiosyncratic world, directly experienced with the ego at each centre. He laid emphasis on 'immediacy of experience' and encouraged the tradition of making a direct analysis of the intrinsic structure of existence, pure data of consciousness and ignored metaphysical or scientific assumptions.

Further shaping and elaborating of this movement was made by Martin Heidegger, one of the main exponents of 20th century existentialism and a leading German Ontologist, who notably tried to disclose the ways of being in his most famous and controversial book *Sein and Zeit* (1927). In this book he discusses what it means for a man to be or how it is to be. It leads to a fundamental question, 'what is the meaning of Being?' And through speculation and interpretation, he had tried to reach the final truth of Existence, the situation of Being.

Sartre divides existentialist thinkers into two: theistic and atheistic. The theistic group includes Kierkegaard, Karl Jaspers, Martin Buber and Gabriel Marcel who are supposed to believe in Christian faith. In the group of atheists, Sartre puts

himself with Heidegger, Nietzsche and other French existentialists, who do not believe in existence of God. What they have in common is that they think that existence precedes essence; they regard human beings as optimistically forlorn, free and supportless creatures.

Standing very close to the philosophical outlook of Sartre is his life-long companion and intellectual associate Simone de Beauvoir (1908-86). She gives an original and independent interpretation of existentialism, though not radically different from Sartre's. Unlike him she chooses to concentrate on the personal and moral aspects of life. She treats existentialism from very much a feminist point of view. In her book, *The Second Sex* (1949), she takes the position that the history of attitudes of women has determined her own views; she denies the existence of basic 'female nature' or 'male nature'; she does not agree with the way we perceive the sexes.

Another proponent of French Existentialism was Albert Camus (1913-60); however, he himself laid no claims to be an existentialist. Existentialism in the 20th century reflects the loss of certainties in the post-modern world. The work of Camus is usually associated with Existentialism because of the prominence of such themes as the apparent absurdity and futility of life, the difference of the universe, and the necessity of engagement in a just cause.

He thought that human existence is absurd. The modern world is full of injustice; millions work in repetitive exploitative jobs. He thought that we should rebel against these absurdities by refusing to participate in them. In *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1943), Camus asserts that by a refusal to surrender, Sisyphus the representative of modern man, can create meaning through a free act of affirmation in which he gives meaning to a situation which until then had none. The living of the

absurd man depends upon the maximum struggle against this absurdity. The world is full of absurdity, but Sisyphus teaches revolt through action that offers freedom and justification for continuing life.

Existentialist thinkers originate their own doctrines, with their own emphasis on particular aspects regarding the human situation in the world. Very often their view points are conflicting and sometimes contradictory. Yet, this philosophical attitude of being attempts to bring out the issues that one relevant for the study. So, it becomes necessary to make separate discussion on some of the existential philosophers.

Prominent Existentialists: Theistic and Atheistic

Theistic Existentialists

SOREN KIERKEGAARD

The origin of existentialism is generally accredited to the 19th-century Danish Writer and religious thinker Kierkegaard (1803-55), the first thinker to call himself existentialist, who reacted against the tradition by insisting that the highest good for the individual is to find his/her own unique vocation. He is critical to the Hegelian dialectical system and the Danish Lutheranism, both of them give importance to the rationality and collective spirit. Hegel maintained the philosophy of reconciliation and synthesis which Kierkegaard called “both/and” system as opposed to his existential dialectic, “either/or”, which emphasizes upon personal choices and responsibility rather than overall rationality. (Mautner 224)

Kierkegaard is different from other existential philosophers in the sense that he believes in the existence of God. But he traces it as the matter of faith. Through faith only, we feel the presence of God. Kierkegaard does not dictate anything because he believes only in the existence of God and not in any doctrine. Religious life, for him, is characterized by faith. So, the Christian doctrine and its quest for

objective truth have nothing to do with the Kierkegaardian concept of Christianity. He argues that “Christianity is therefore not a doctrine, but the fact that god has existed. (Faith 857).

Kierkegaard supports the choices like Sartre and Camus. He believes that we are free to make choices; one exists up to the point of making choices. Jostein Gaarder in *Sophie's World* remarks: “It is only when we act especially we make significant choices—that we relate to own existence” (380).

Kierkegaardian faith is paradoxical. When we believe in God, we believe both in his finite and infinite existence. The finite is related to the outward form or existence of God, whereas the infinite is concerned with the inward faith and non-existence. He sees the whole world as a corporation of ambiguities and paradoxes. Considering the difficulties to exist in such paradoxical condition Kierkegaard describes:

Existing is ordinarily regarded as no very complex matter, much less an art, since we all exist; but abstract thinking takes rank as an accomplishment. But really to exist, so as to interpenetrate one's existence with consciousness, at one and the same time eternal and as if far removed from existence, and yet also present in existence and in the process of becoming: that is truly difficult. (*Concrete Existence* 814)

Therefore, for Kierkegaard, real existence is possible only when one becomes aware of the paradoxical presence of God, Christianity and man.

Similarly, Kierkegaard believes that truth is subjectivity. This concept of “subjective truth” has influenced the twentieth century existentialists. There cannot be any truth which is objective and universal. Instead of single truth, there are many

truths which are personal. Every right and wrong or true and false is characterized by the individual decision and thought. Then for them, traditional values do not work; they cannot govern the individual. For Kierkegaard, one should protest against the prevailing system and affirm existence by making one's own choice.

He supports the idea that self realization of the individual comes when he takes full responsibility for his life. In this sense, he seems to accept the absurdity of the world as fully as Sartre or Camus. All existentialists have followed Kierkegaard in stressing the importance of individual action in deciding question of truth. They have insisted that personal experience and acting on one's own convictions are essential to arrive at truth. This emphasis on the perspective of the individual agent has also made existentialists suspicious of systematic reasoning.

KARL JASPERS

Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) is a prominent founder of modern existentialism. He devotes himself in exploring of truth and reality which can speak even in despair, in suicide, in the passion towards darkness, in every form of negative determination. For him, disgrace and anxiety are the essential consequences of free will. He rejects the declared religious dogma, but takes the authority of Churches as philosophical faith. Agreeing with Husserl and others, Jaspers regards our consciousness as always intentional that is directed meaningfully to something which we seek to realize clearly as given (*History* 431). We connect merely with other objects and consult self needs to be creative, free and original and that truth is infinitely more than scientific correctness. Communication is the way to truth in all its forms. Thus, the intellect finds clarity only in discussion and experiences.

The self, for Jaspers, does not exist as a transcendent reality constituting a separate world, different from the world of our experience (432). Instead, there is only

one world, which we may more properly appreciate as an appearance of the self. This existential exposition is supreme of all theoretical objective facts, but this supremacy does not lead us to a superiority being. Self is will in itself. This existential exposition is supreme of all theoretical objective facts, but this supremacy does not lead us to a superiority being. Self is will in itself. The will is creative and it creates itself which is consciousness. The existential self is thus related to consciousness and to the world and therefore, to the historical situation in which it finds itself. He denounces self sufficiency of science and empirical observation and the seclusion of individual from communication being (*Will* 865). The individual cannot live fully if there is no another being to communicate with him. Jaspers is very close with all things around him. He says:

We cannot have objective possession of a truth that is the eternal truth, and because being-there is possible only with other being-there, and existence can come into its own only with other existence, communication is the form in which truth is revealed in time. (866)

Jaspers wants to create a balance between rational and irrational movement of self. The truth is that it possesses a perpetual question without which we turn back into the more or less dirty stereotype of self-satisfaction, which is inadequately thought. The possible truth and reality can sheath in despair, anxiety, suicide, and dark passion. The existential root is not destructive will but a salvation from nihilism because it preserves confidence through its movement.

MARTIN BUBER

Buber (1878-1965), a Jewish philosopher and religious thinker, puts forward the concept of relationship between men, nature and God. Like Jaspers, he rejects the idea of separate existence of human beings. He emphasizes the importance of the

relation between self and object (I-It). According to him, the relation should be concrete and immediate an “I” to a “Thou” and not an abstract and objective, an “I” to an “It” one (Primary Words 870). He says the world is two-fold, in accordance with his two-fold attitude. The primary word “I-Thou”, not “I-It”, can only be spoken with the whole being (870). The “I-It” relationship is not a genuine relationship because while “I” regards others as “It”, “I” happens to be perfectly alone. Ellmann and Feidelson further clarify his point, “Every ‘Thou’ in the eyes of art and love” (807). Buber summarizes the concept thus:

He who is overcome by the world of *It* is bound to see, in the dogma immutable process; ... in every truth this dogma enslaves him only the more deeply to the world of *It*. But the world of ‘Thou’ is not closed. He who goes out to it with concentrated being and rises power to enter into relation becomes aware of freedom. (875)

The difference between the concept of “I-it” and of “I-Thou” is that the relation between the earlier one has to do with past because all objective knowledge is about one’s past, whereas the relationship has to do with present in case of the later one as we are prepared for any and every response to our address. So, we should assume our relationship with God as “I-Thou”. Our “I-Thou” relationship with God never changes into “I-It” because He is absolute and always present with us.

GABRIEL MARCEL

Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973), a French philosopher and playwright, was the Christian mystic nearer to Kierkegaard’s own position. He was the advocate of existentialism in terms of Christian belief. Maunter comments, “He did not agree with the empiricist and analytical conceptions of philosophy which he thought was too narrow” (256). Marcel says that the method of philosophy depends upon recognition

of the mystery of being or on the impossibility of discovering Being through objective or rational analyses. In his opinion, both hope and love can exist only on the basis of faith. About mystery and faith, Marcel writes:

The existence of other selves also is accepted on faith. In these several ways, we realize some presence going beyond the immediate here and now. Ultimately, in the highest kind of faith we realize the supreme transcendence, which is called God. Neither the existence of external objects nor that of other selves of God is rationally demonstrable. Each is revealed by a direct contact or participation. (*History of Philosophy* 437)

Atheistic Existentialists

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

Nietzsche (1844-1900), a German philosopher, was a radical critic of the Western Metaphysics and Christianity. Both the philosophical tradition and the Christianity were corrupted in his eye because they taught merely abstraction. He, too, reacted against Hegel's philosophy and the German historicism. "According to Nietzsche", Gaarder mentions in *Sophie's world*, "Both Christianity and traditional philosophy had turned away from the real world and pointed toward 'heaven' or 'the world of ideas'" (455). Nietzsche asked the people to be true to the world and not to listen to those who offer them supernatural expectations.

He proclaimed the 'death of God' and went on to reject the entire Judeo-Christian moral tradition in favor of a heroic pagan ideal. He called Christianity a 'slave morality' and held that religion provides no truth because 'God is dead' and Christianity has become the shelter of weak and disable people that he hated. He

bitterly criticizes Christianity in his famous essay *The Death of God and the Antichrist*:

The Christian conception God—God as God of the sick. God as a spider, God as spirit—is one of the most corrupt conceptions of the divine ever attained on earth. It may even represent the low-water mark in the descending development of divine types. God degenerated into the contradiction of life, instead of being its transfiguration and eternal yes! God as the declaration of war against life, against nature, against the will to live! (912)

Nietzsche focused precisely on the non-existence of God as implying the non-existence of all values. He proposes, in the absence of God, the concept of the ‘Superman’ and ‘Will to Power’. The superman is the higher man above ‘the herd’ and is free from any restrictions imposed by society. The supermen are people of restless energy who enjoy living dangerously, have contempt for meekness and humility, and dismiss humanitarian sentiments. Nietzsche also rejects the concern for the welfare of the crowd and establishment of ‘common good’ or ‘herd-desire’. The man who is in search of a general truth accepted by the culture and society is an objective man—‘a mirror’. He is no more than a “self-less” object that awaits others’ recognition and evaluation. (*Subjective Will* 817). But, as Kaufmann comments, Nietzsche’s idea of “will to power” is not protofascist. Instead, it is the natural and deeper psychological motive of human psyche.

Summing up, Nietzsche’s insistence upon the irrational and upon the individual who confronts existence heroically, without hypocrisy, give meaning to it—his own meaning was crucial to the shaping of the doctrine of twentieth century existentialists.

MARTIN HEIDEGGER

Heidegger (1889-1976), a German philosopher, is another leading figure of atheistic existentialism. His work has exerted a major and enduring influence on not only philosophy, but also the theology, political thought and aesthetics. Although he himself rejected to be classified as an existentialist, his influence on Sartre and the existential movement is unavoidable. He was deeply influenced by his teacher Edmund Husserl; his ideas constitute the basis of existentialism.

Heidegger's main concern is of the 'question of being'. He held the belief that man should face explicitly the problem of Being, he has to determine his own existence, create his own possibilities and make choices and commitment (Perry et al. 756). He distinguished between beings and Being. The oblivion of Being (individual) into the beings (group) has made us lost in unreal existence (*Recollection* 879). To get back the lost Being, Heidegger suggests us to return back into the ground of metaphysics and find the roots of our existence.

He thought that western philosophy had been over obsessed with the problem of knowledge. For Heidegger, the individual as being-in-the world was characterized by action and anxiety: knowing the world is not our primary way of being in the world. He regarded his investigations as an attempt to disclose or uncover the concealed nature of being. His most fundamental question was: why should there be being at all, when there could be nothing? Heidegger argued that humanity finds itself in an incomprehensible, indifferent world. Human beings can never hope to understand why they are here: instead, each individual must choose a goal and follow it with passionate conviction, aware of the certainty of death and the ultimate meaningless of one's life. For Heidegger, the principal object of investigation is the

search for being (Sein) and more particularly, man's being (Dasein). Thomas Mautner clarifies the concept thus:

Dasein, this particular way of existing, is different from the ordinary existence of things in the world around us. The difference is that things are determinate and have their distinctive properties. That is their kind of being. But the sort of being that I manifest is not that of a thing-with-properties. It is a range of possible ways to be. (183)

Heidegger's principal work is *Being and Time (Sein und Zeit, 1927)*. Being, he says, is felt by the difference of non-being and being. Death is the ultimate of non-being. Death, serving as a limit, calls for authenticity in human existence. The human being for the most part 'falls' from the authentic way of being. The human being is continually falling till his death. But in freedom there is dread and anxiety (angst) that compels the human being to select and take charge of his being. Anxiety shows the light of dynamic existence.

He considers human existence as tied by temporal dimension, which is the existential time. He accepts that one cannot escape the historical context because he is always bounded by conditions and outlooks inherited from the past. The Heideggerian concept of 'time' moves not from past through present to future but from future through past to present. He obviates that we experience past in guilt and we anticipate future in dread. The time is my own time because I myself experience it and it is finite because my death certain. In this way, my destiny is surrounded by a temporal context from which I cannot run away, but can confront it with a full conscience.

Heidegger's another best work is *The Essence of Truth (Vom Wesen der Wahrheit 1988)* which attempts to offer the most thorough explanation of the most fundamental and abiding theme in his philosophy: the difference between truth as 'the

unhiddenness of beings' and truth as 'the correctness of propositions'. The essence of truth does not refer to anything static, but to an 'occurrence' within which the human being is actively situated. In his later works we find him being interested in the history of concepts in language.

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE

Sartre (1905-80), a French philosopher, was the leading advocate of Existentialism, who was offered Nobel Prize for his contribution in literature in 1964, but he made the existentialist choice of refusing it. The key word in Sartre's philosophy is 'existence'. He said that a material thing is simply 'in itself', but mankind is 'for itself'. The being of man is therefore not the same as the being of things.

Sartre in his masterpiece work *Existentialism and Human Emotions* tries to defend existentialism against some charges which have been brought against it, particularly the charges made by communists and Christians. The basic charge was that they (existentialists) put the emphasis on the dark side of human being. Logically, he addresses those charges centering on his concept of existence of human being and further developing ideas.

He says that man's existence takes priority over what ever he might otherwise be. The fact that I exist takes priority over what I am. Sartre says, "existence precedes essence". He writes:

First of all, man exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and, only afterwards, defines himself. If man, as the existentialist conceives him, is indefinable, it is because at first he is nothing. Only afterward will he be something, and he himself will have made what he will be. Thus, there is no human nature, since there is no God to conceive it. Not only

is man what he conceives himself to be, but he is also only what he wills himself to be after this thrust toward existence. (15)

Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself, for him, is the first principle of existentialism, which is also called subjectivity. Man, Sartre explains, first exists, that is, that man first of all is the being who hurls himself toward a future and who is conscious of imagining himself as being in the future.

Sartre says that man feels alien in a world without meaning. When he describes man's alienation, Gaarder explains in *Sophie's World*, he is echoing the central ideas of Hegel and Marx. Man's feeling of alienation in the world creates a sense of despair, boredom, nausea, and absurdity (457). Gaarder further illustrates thus:

Sartre was describing the twentieth-century city dweller. [...] Sartre experienced man's freedom as a curse. 'Man is condemned to be free', he said. 'Condemned because he has not created himself—and is nevertheless free. Because having once been hurled into world, he is responsible for everything he does. (457)

This freedom condemns us to make choices throughout our lives. There are no eternal values or norms we can adhere to, which makes our choices even more significant. Sartre emphasized that man must never disclaim the responsibility for his actions. On the other hand, our freedom obliges us to make something of ourselves, to live 'authentically' or 'truly'.

Like most of the existentialists, Sartre emphasized upon the subjectivity of the individual. But the individual is not free from other beings. When he becomes conscious of Cartesian cogito, "I think therefore I am", he also becomes aware of others that constitute his whole being. Sartre writes, "The other is indispensable to my

existence and equally so to any knowledge I can have of myself” (*Common* 868). Sartre tried to prove that consciousness in itself is nothing until it has perceived something. Because consciousness is always conscious of something. And this ‘something’ is provided just as much by ourselves as by our surroundings. We are partly instrumental in deciding what we perceive by selecting what is significant for us. (*Sophie’s World* 458)

As human existence is self-conscious without being pre-defined, we as autonomous being are ‘condemned to be free’ – compelled to make future directed choices. These choices induce anxiety and uncertainty into our psyches. We are free to create our own interpretation of ourselves in relation to the world, to create a project of possibilities, of authentic actions as the expression of freedom. Thomas Mautner mentions the nature of existence in Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*:

The Structure of Being and Nothingness is clearly Cartesian, despite the strong influence of Heidegger at the time. On the one hand, there is consciousness (being-for-itself or *pour soi*) and on the other, the existence of mere things (being-in-itself or *en soi*). (379)

‘En soi’ is the being of an object that is fixed and static. ‘Pour soi’ is the being of the human being that is fluid and free. It is open towards the future. The human being is nothing at birth and in life he is just the sum of life. To refuge in bad faith is to despair freedom. The human being, Sartre declares, is the maker of his destiny and is condemned to make his own decision.

Sartre’s philosophy is explicitly atheistic and he declared that human beings require a rational basis for their lives but are unable to achieve one, and thus human life is a ‘futile passion’. Although Sartre claimed there was no innate meaning to life, he did not mean that nothing mattered. He was not a nihilist; Sartre believed that life

must have meaning. It is an imperative. But it is we ourselves who must create this meaning in our own lives. To exist means to create our own life. So, Sartre insisted that his existentialism is a form of humanism, and strongly emphasized human freedom, choice and responsibility.

ALBERT CAMUS

Albert Camus (1913-1960) was Algerian-born French scholar; he developed his career in many fields such as politics, journalism, theatre managing, literature and philosophy. His position in the existentialist movement is highly appreciated, and claimed as an adherent of this doctrine. *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1940), a philosophical essay on suicide and the absurd, is among the best-known works of Camus. In *Essays on the Creation of Knowledge*, the editors write about Camus' concerns of humankind:

The myth of Sisyphus is a meditation on the theme of suicide. Camus was faced with the view that life itself is without meaning. The traditional values had been weakened by war, lack of faith in authority, attacks on religion, and the worldwide economic depression that cast everything into doubt. Camus was searching through his own thoughts about suicide to see if he could come to a conclusion about life that would be positive. His question was: How does humankind live in an absurd world? He treats the ancient myth as an allegory for our own time. (67)

Camus believes that human being is an isolated existent in an alien universe. The universe doesn't possess any inherent truth, value or meaning. And it is absurd to seek meaning into this universe. So, absurdity of life is Camus' major concept. However, he thinks that we should rebel against the absurdities of injustice and

million works in repetitive exploitative jobs by refusing to participate in them. In myth of Sisyphus, Camus asserts that by defying the gods, Sisyphus, the representative of modern man, who was assigned repetitive task which would last through eternity as a punishment for his “rebellion” against the gods, can create meaning through a free act of affirmation in which he gives meaning to a situation which until then had none. Camus writes:

I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that store, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy. (70)

Albert Camus supports choices like Sartre. Choices may lead to repetition and repetition leads us to a sense of absurdity. Sisyphus is given choices; he chooses to face punishment; rather than surrendering before God, he chooses the tough work, and makes his fortune himself. Camus believes one has to trace the challenge, but not commit suicide. He believes that choice leads us to absurdity but joy comes out of it. Revolt through action against the absurd world offers freedom and justification for continuing life.

Besides, Camus' first novel *The Stranger* (1940) carries the theme of absurd mainly concentrating on the alienation of the human being in the midst of silent universe. His great novel, *The plague* (1947), the story of a plague descending upon and decimating a city and the reaction of the individuals as life under the horror

becomes more and more meaningless and impossible is another example of how the doctrine of Existentialism works. Its symbolic application to our time is apparent.

After all, Camus advocates freedom, individuality, choices and consequently the human existence. For him, authenticity is to exercise one's free will and to choose the activities and goals that will be meaningful for one's self. With this approach, even Sisyphus can be engaged and satisfied with what he is doing. He undergoes a challenging task and upholds heroism.

The Basic Existential Standpoint

Generally, existentialists share common views. Yet, having viewed the ideas given by the philosopher, we can discuss basic existentialist standpoint.

The first existentialist theme is **alienation** or **estrangement**. The existentialists say that all our human relations are poisoned by feelings of alienation from any 'other'. Alienation and hostility arise within the family: between parents and children, between the husband and wife, between the children. It affects all social and work relations, and most cruelly, alienation dominates the relationship of love. Alienation is a theme which Hegel started for the modern world on many levels and in many subtle forms. The alienation that exists in society reflects upon the alienation of individual human being who looks for their own desires in estrangement from the actual institutional workings of their society. Alienated from the social system, they do not know that their desires are system-determined and system-determining. And there is the alienation of those who do not identify with the institutions of their own society, who find their society empty and meaningless. Apart from my own conscious being, all else, they say, is otherness from which I am estranged.

Existence is another basic theme of existentialism. Being alive doesn't mean to be in existence. And all the things and beings do not exist. One exists only when

one is conscious of one's existence. Man is conscious, so he exists. We are conscious of our existence. We are what we make ourselves to be. So we should not search meaning, we should rather create meaning through our actions. About its primacy over essence, existence is defined in *Campton's Encyclopedia & Fact-Index* thus:

Flowers, animals, and stones all exist. But people exist in a different way. Individual are unique-able to think about themselves and the world in which they find themselves and make choices. They can choose because they are free, and the choices they make establish the future into which they project themselves. (371)

Man is a conscious subject, rather than a thing to be predicted or manipulated: he exists as conscious being, and not in accordance with any definition, essence, generalization or system. Existentialism says I am noting else but my own conscious existence.

Similarly, **Anxiety** is another theme that characterizes existentialism. It is the sense of anguish, a generalized uneasiness, a fear or dread which is not directed to any specific object. Anguish is the dread of the nothingness of human existence. It is the underlying, all-pervasive, universal condition of human existence. Being bored or feeling of anxiety means we are conscious of our existence. When one becomes conscious of one's existence, he shows the radical dissatisfaction with the prevailing norms and systems of society. Due to this dissatisfaction, one feels sense of anguish. Consciousness makes the people tragic. One becomes tragic only when one is conscious. So, consciousness is a block on the way to human optimism.

Existentialism agrees with certain streams of thought in Judaism and Christianity which see human existence as fallen, and human life as lived in suffering and sin, guilt and anxiety. This dark and foreboding picture of human life leads

existentialists to reject ideas such as happiness, enlightenment, optimism, a sense of well-being, the serenity of stoicism, since these can only reflect a superficial understanding of life or a naïve and foolish way of denying the despairing, tragic aspect of human existence.

The fourth basic standpoint of existentialism is **absurdity**. To exist as a human being is inexplicable, and wholly absurd. In Heidegger's terms, we are 'hurled into the being'. Each of us is simply here, thrown into this time and place- but why now? Why here? Kierkegaard asked. For existentialists like Sartre, the absence of God has a much larger significance than the metaphysics of creation. Without God there is no purpose, no value, and no meaning in the world. A world without purpose, value, or meaning is literally senseless, worthless, meaningless, empty and hopeless. One of the characters in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novel *Crime and Punishment* (1866) says, 'without God, all is permitted'.

Indeed, if the loss of God means the loss of all meaning and value, then actions are without meaning or value either, and one cannot say that it matters whether actions are 'right' or 'wrong' since those words or the corresponding actions, don't mean anything more than anything else. Things do not have any purpose and their existence does not have any meaning. Thus, their meaning is their existence but the very existence is meaningless from the absurd point of view.

Similarly, **identity** is another theme of existentialism. People can identify themselves on the basis of their gender, color and ethnicity. Man asks himself different questions about his relation to the social and physical world and tries to understand the problems in the relationship between individual and community. The question of identity – *who am I?* is central in existentialism. Sartre thought that we are free to define our identity, there is no script for our roles; there is no essence that tells

us who we are and what we ought to be. We are all free and well, all bear the responsibility to find the answer to this existential riddle. Struggles for identities are struggles within individual and individual with group and the whole society. Hegel viewed the question of identity as a question of the relationship between human subjects: when two subjects meet, a struggle for 'recognition'. For Hegel, it was a struggle of life and death, struggle to determine who is to be 'master' and who is to be 'slave', and it was a question of being recognized either as superior or inferior, indeed. Identity is not something that we 'have' like hair color or genetic make up. It is something that we gain through a tension-filled inter-subjective process, and it is something that can be endlessly re-challenged.

Likewise, **death** is also one of the themes of existentialism. It is the final nothingness hangs over like a *sword of Damocles* at each moment of life. One has filled with anxiety as times when one permit oneself to be aware of this. The existentialists varied view towards death. The whole of the being, for Heidegger, seems to drift away into nothing. What he even says is that that his death is his most authentic, significant moment, his personal potentiality, which he alone must suffer. And if he takes death into his life, acknowledges it, and faces it squarely, he will free himself from the anxiety of death the pettiness of life—and only then he will be free to become himself. But, the unaware person tries to live as if death is not actual; he tries to escape its reality. For Sartre, death is the total non-existence. Death is as absurd as birth—it is not ultimate, authentic moment of the life; it is nothing but the wiping out of the existence as conscious being. Death is only another witness to the absurdity of human existence.

The existentialists also consider **protest** as a basic standpoint. The existential wo/man is not governed by the laws that the society has formulated. The social

mechanism, for him/her, always imposes the burden. So s/he protests the social system and likes to stay above it to affirm her/his existence. Wo/man is stereotyped and does not do anything new, if s/he continues the traditions of society. So, existential wo/man governs himself/herself with the laws that s/he has made.

III

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF A *DELICATE BALANCE*

The General Overview of the Play

The three-act play *A Delicate Balance* takes place in the well-appointed living room of Tobias and Agnes and spans less than forty-eight hours. In the first act, Tobias, a successful businessman recently retired, is having an after-dinner drink with his wife. Agnes contemplates, not pleasantly, what it would be like to go mad, and they discuss Agnes' alcoholic younger sister, Claire, who lives with them. When Agnes leaves to phone her daughter, Julia, Tobias and Claire discuss especially Claire's recounting of her experience at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting; the discussion further exposes closeness between Claire and Tobias and, at the same time, an antagonism between Claire and Agnes.

Agnes returns informing them that Julia, her fourth marriage having failed, is coming home immediately. Tobias recounts the story of a pet cat, whom, out of frustration, he had taken to a vet to be put to death. Both Claire and Agnes try to assuage Tobias' guilt over the pet's death, which still haunts him. When they hear a car approach, all are surprised at the sudden visit of the unexpected guests, Harry and Edna—the close friends of both Tobias and Agnes for forty years. They say that they feel uneasy and distressed at home alone, and strangely frightened, for no particular reason.

Saturday evening before dinner, Agnes tries to calm Julia, who is angry about the intruders who had remained locked in her former bedroom all day. She is also frustrated at not receiving the sympathy and condolence she expects from her parents and aunts. Tobias is frustrated by the bickering between his wife, daughter, and sister-in-law, by the government's investigation of his income tax returns, and Julia's return home. An antagonistic conversation ensues between the three. Harry and Edna come down, announcing that they are going home get their things and will return after dinner.

After dinner, Agnes tries to placate Julia by characterizing herself as an objective observer whose job is to maintain a reasonable balance among all the elements in the family, and to keep it from falling apart. Claire appears with an accordion. When Harry and Edna reappear, they assume rights and privileges in the household, angering and distressing Julia. Growing hysterical at the persistence of their demands, she runs wildly from the room. After a while she enters with a pistol and orders her father to expel the unwanted guests immediately. Tobias disarms her, and while Edna is explaining that long-term friendship has given them the right to live there, Agnes led her daughter up to bed. Harry and Edna retire, along with Claire, leaving Tobias alone in the living room.

Early Sunday Morning, Agnes asks Tobias what he has decided to do about Harry and Edna, but his response is evasive and conclusive. They even discuss Agnes' longing for a grandchild and Tobias' fear of having another child. When Julia and Claire antagonize each other, Tobias tries to calm things down by focusing the discussion on what to do about Harry and Edna. Tobias looks upon them as friends; Julia considers them intruders. Agnes believes that Harry and Edna are bearers of "disease", "terror", "plague", and that on Claire is immune. As the family defers to Tobias for his decision, Harry and Edna suddenly appear. After some pleasantries, Harry, at the others' absence, asks several times whether Tobias really wants him and Edna, and says that if Tobias

and Agnes had made a similar plea to stay with him and Edna, he would not have allowed it. Tobias delivers a long and impassioned soliloquy, which ends with an emotional plea to Harry to stay. A subdued good-bye scene is followed by a curtain speech by Agnes, in which she expresses astonishment at the wonder of daylight and the order with which daylight arrives.

Choice and Freedom

Existentialist philosopher, Sartre, says: “Man is condemned to be free. Condemned because he has not created himself--and is nevertheless free” (457). This freedom condemns us to make something of ourselves, to live ‘authentically’ or ‘truly’. Since we make choices, we create meaning ourselves. Even when we are not choosing, we are still choosing. In this context, Macintyre says, “I have chosen not to choose” (149). The characters in the play make no choice, but ultimately are making choices of not to choose; they create their lives themselves. Albee himself contends that the play is about the loss of choice. He mentions about freedom of choice in the play:

The play concerns ... the rigidity and ultimate paralysis which afflicts those who settle in too easily, waking up one day to discover that all the choices they have avoided no longer give them any freedom of choice, and that what choices they do have left are beside the point.

(qtd. in Introduction)

The characters in the play hide their real selves and like to live in fantasy and illusion. They create their own truth, as Kierkegaard says, “Truth is subjectivity”, because reality is too bitter. Agnes and Tobias they create their own truth by burdening the past with the problem of forgetting. Agnes not only has no desire for self-knowledge but also deliberately guards against any diagnosis of the family’s ills.

Her artificial and carefully measured language reflects the controlled pattern of her existence. She desires stasis, a condition comfortable precisely because it is badly known and therefore can be controlled.

Tobias, emotionally suppressed and withdrawn man, covers his deepest fears with a mask of self control and quiet, and he suppresses them with alcohol. He has a hysterical fear of death and of being alone, and this allows him to tolerate demands of his family. He is condemned to living out his days with awareness because he lacks the comforting illusions of properties and magnanimity that Agnes can call on solace. Claire chooses alcoholism to annoy and embarrass Agnes; to amuse Tobias, with whom she might have an affair; to prick Julia's pretensions; and to stand her nose at society. In addition, Claire shares her experience of an event in the market: she goes to buy "topless swimsuit", but returns without it when she couldn't meet the size. This swimsuit symbolizes her desire of freedom that she stands against social norms and values. Julia returns home by making a choice of divorce. Similarly, when they are confused and confronted at the intruders' presence in their house, Claire shows two choices to her sister: "You take'em in, or you throw'em out" (92). But, eventually, Harry and Edna decide to turn back when they get epiphany of insight.

Family Relationship and Conflict

There is the absence of harmony and peace in the family, rather what is there in the family is misunderstanding, lack of faith, unhappiness, frustration and conflict. The family members share sarcastic and sardonic words, and often show irresponsible behaviors. The family bond is very fragile. They do not meet the minimum standards set by society.

Agnes tolerates the presence of her alcoholic sister, Claire, in her home but never tries to understand her; Tobias gently chides his daughter for her failed

marriages but ignores her unhappiness, and Agnes and Tobias live amicably together but lack deep emotional bonds. Julia tells her father that her indifference to him appeared during her adolescence, when she first perceived his withdrawal of affection from her. Claire, who alone sees reality clearly, drowns her perceptive insights in alcohol because she finds them too distressing to endure, however, she makes some humorous remark that provide comic relief in the family. In Act One, Tobias questions Claire about their love relation:

TOBIAS. "If we do not love someone ... never have loved someone ..."

CLAIRE (*An abrupt, brief laugh*). Oh stop it! "Love" is not the problem. You love Agnes and Agnes loves Julia and Julia loves me and I love you. We all love each other; yes we do. We love each other. (40)

Love between the family members cannot be sustained when it is one-sided. Tobias loves Agnes necessarily does not mean Agnes loves Tobias, as it does happen in calculation. There is no real love between them, which is merely superficial, indeed. They just pretend that they love each other.

They are habituated with alcoholics and going to alcoholic club. Participating in the martini, taking cognac, vodka and drugs is Tobias' daily routine. Claire also owns the same business. Tobias has almost lost his masculine role in the family; he sometime feels his status being replaced by Agnes in the households. When Tobias advances her to take drugs, she replies that they are merely temporary, even addiction, for her, is a repeated temporary stalling. Her concern is with peace not mere relief. She says she is not "compulsive" like Claire (10).

Agnes who likes to call herself a “balancer” or “fulcrum” plans of keeping “the family in shape”, maintains it and holds it. She muses frequently, on sex roles. From her perspective, it is the wife’s function to maintain the family after the husband has made the decisions: she only holds the reins, Tobias decides the route. However, both the sisters share antagonistic communication all the time; each of them sees one the envy of the other. One likes the other’s absence or death in the family. Agnes expresses Tobias her antagonistic relation with Claire at, “[...] the one thing sharper than a serpent’s tooth is a sister’s ingratitude” (6).

The delicate balance of the family gets disrupted, as they think, at the intruders’ presence that invites major conflict in the family. They are alone and alienated from each other even if they are in the mass.

Anxiety and Despair

For existentialists Anxiety is the sense of anguish, a generalized uneasiness, a fear or dread which is not directed to any specific object. Anguish is the dread of the nothingness of human existence. It is the underlying, all-pervasive, universal condition of human existence. Being bored or feeling of anxiety means we are conscious of our existence. When one becomes conscious of one’s existence, he shows the radical dissatisfaction with the prevailing norms and systems of society. Due to dissatisfaction, one feels sense of anguish.

Repetition plays a key role in understanding how Albee’s work explores a traumatic past. Agnes’ impatience with her daughter’s pain is a result of the fact not just that she repeats herself but also that she repeats her mother as well. She often mourns over the loss of her child, Teddy. She says she doesn’t want, however wishes, another child, another loss. Tobias doesn’t like to hear more of their dead Teddy. He who likes his own room never sleeps with his wife thereafter the death of the son.

Julia's home comings and goings, substitute for Teddy's absence. Her failed marriages and childlessness makes Agnes despair. Her desire to be a grandmother, to enjoy the pleasures of the maternal once more, to be "the youngest older woman in the block" (142), is a displacement of her desire to have a replacement for Teddy.

Heidegger explains *angst* as a constitutive element of *dasein* or *being-in-the-world*. Anxiety reverses the causal relation implicit in fear, that is, fear requires a definite object to be afraid of, while anxiety generates the effect of fear without the cause. The objectless nature of their anxiety, that its source remains somehow hidden, is what again point to an encounter with the Thing. The problem is complicated further by the placeness nature of anxiety. Just as there is no apparent object or cause for anxiety, so there is no place to locate it. Harry and Edna, who suddenly arrive at their friends' house, say:

HARRY. We were scared.

(Silence; AGNES confirming EDNA. HARRY stock still. Quite innocent, almost childlike)

It was like being lost: very young again, with the dark, and lost.

There was no ... thing ... to be ... frightened of, but ...

EDNA: *(Tears, quite hysteria)*

WE WERE FRIGHTENED ... AND THERE WAS NOTHING.

(silence in the room). (49)

Agnes is the cause of the family's anxiety in the sense she figures herself as the melancholic fulcrum upon which the mountain of the family's burdens is packed; on the other hand, Claire, who claims the role of "effect", is described by Agnes as cause.

Question of Identity

The question of Identity is also central issue in the play *A Delicate Balance*. Sartre thought that we are free to define our identity. Man asks himself different questions: Who am I? What is my relation to the social and physical world? There seems to be something problematic in the relationship between individual and community as conceived in Sartre's existentialism. People generally can identify themselves on the basis of their gender, colour, and ethnicity. Identity is not something that we 'have' like hair colour or genetic make up. It is something that we gain through a tension-filled with inter-subjective process and it is something that can be endlessly recharged. Struggle for identities are struggles within individual and individual with group and the whole society.

At the right beginning of the play, Agnes speaks to Tobias wistfully that one day she "might very easily lose her mind" (01). Agnes is not "literally threatened with insanity" and really does not want "to go mad" (72). Rather she "is attracting attention to her unhappiness" (73). She wanders from the problem of living with Claire into thinking about "becoming a stranger in ... the world, quite ... uninvolved" (13). She does not *drift* precisely because the belief that she "very well might" (14) go mad is what holds the family in its delicate balance; she must fantasize about becoming a mad stranger in the house in order to make clear the responsibility she has taken by maintaining the *status quo*. She fantasizes about being "uninvolved" in order to resist being an "embarrassment" to Tobias (15). Agnes identifies herself as an objective observer, while placating Julia, whose job is to maintain the family, to keep it from falling apart. She has established and controls a smooth surface of routine and habit in order to cover the web interlocking illusions and self-deceptions that prevail in the mind of the other family members.

Claire's outrageous comments are meant as much to reflect her own bitterness as to shake Tobias out of his mute acceptance of Agnes' dominance. Claire becomes an alcoholic in order to justify her existence. Once she attended Alcoholic Anonymous meeting, martini but not was alcoholic. She reveals Tobias her past habit:

Until I learned ... and being a slow student then in my young middle age, slowly ... that I was not, nor had ever been ... a alcoholic ... or an. Either. What I did not have in common with those people. That they were alcoholics, and I was not. That I was just a drunk. That they couldn't help it; I could, and wouldn't. That they were sick, and I was merely ... willful. (28)

Both Agnes and Claire nurture the dream that the burden of their respective duties will disappear when the other dies. Each harbours the fantasy of a life alone with Tobias. At one point Claire muses that unless Tobias kills Agnes, she will have no way of knowing "whether I want to live" (25). Agnes is tired of the role but continuous to play it. One of the reasons she gives is that, by sheer repetition, she loses her sense of identity. In effect, madness and alcoholism have become, for both women, household duties.

This is the significant statement of existential philosophy that when someone does not find his value on existence in the society, he tries to establish it by action. Even Kierkegaard says: "I heard, therefore I am". Albee supports the idea that self realization of the individual comes then when takes full responsibility for his life like other existential philosopher. Most of the existentialists have insisted that personal experience and acting on one's own convictions are essential to arrive at truth. Tobias' act of violence of a cat, in a sense, is to retain his identity. He says he killed the cat because she didn't "care" him.

Harry's Decision to Kill the Pet

When Agnes reproaches Tobias for having failed to admonish their daughter appropriately following her three previous divorces, and he responds by recounting a story about a cat he had once owned that had stopped liking him for no reason; when his efforts to regain his pet's affection fails, out of frustration over the failed relationship, he had it killed. The conversation between Tobias and Agnes reads thus:

TOBIAS (*Defiance and self-loathing*). I had her killed.

AGNES (*Kindly correcting*). You had her put to sleep. She was old.

You had her put to sleep.

TOBIAS (*Correcting*). I had her killed. I took her to the vet and he took her ... he took her into the back and

(*Louder*)

he gave her an injection and killed her! I had her *killed!* (39)

Tobias's story of his cat symbolically captures the hidden cries of all of the human relationships of the play. It expresses Tobias' inability to deal with relationships that have gone bad. He does not know how to handle Julia, thinks that it is too late to make Claire happy, and has given up sexual relationship with Agnes because he does not want to take the chance of being hurt again as he was by the death of their son. The story illustrates Tobias' attitude toward having demands placed on him and being judged. This shows his identity crisis that is his degrading masculine role in the family and his efforts to regain it with the action of violence.

With the possibility of a radical shift in the power relation comes Tobias' response: the monologue about the cat he once loved and killed. They find out just what "Life alone with Toby" would be like—murderous. This speech would appear to function as a cautionary tale about fantasizing the death of a housemate. What

mystifies and infuriates Tobias about the changed behavior of the cat is that he is suddenly confronted with the burden of the other's desire – “what does the other want from me?” Tobias is able to live with the cat as long as it makes no demands of him. More to the point, the cat's subsequent refusal to make a demand when a demand is called for – its choosing to ignore him, denying his existence – drives him to have her killed. His relationship to the cat is predicated on misrecognition of the terms of the friendship. Tobias imagines himself loved by the cat simply because he, as subject, has loved the cat first.

In other term, Tobias' anger comes not from the cat's “refusal” but from Tobias's own insistence that the other, who cannot remember in the way Tobias does, be put in the position of being reminded of his love: “Damn you, you like me; God damn it, you stop this! I haven't *done* anything to you” (44).

His decision to kill her protects his ego, however, Claire calls it “the less ... ugly choice” (39), the act still haunts him, which is still a way of avoiding the other's desire. The cat, as Thing, functions as a nonsensical signifier; as Tobias puts it, she provides “no reason” (45) for her resistance. Her absurd refusal simply places a temptation in Tobias' path.

Agnes may stand for cat, who refuses to supply him with a solution to their dilemma. Here is the moment to remind ourselves that a fulcrum is not only a balance but also an obstacle used for the purposes of leavers.

Confrontation and Death

The play about the death-in-life existence is manifested in betrayal, abandonment, loneliness, and indifference. In the play, everyone gets confronted, one way or another, with something. Tobias confronts the cat before he kills it; Julia confronts her parents with bloodied knees and a scarred heart; Claire confronts

everyone in the play including herself, with truths about themselves that they cannot see or upon which they cannot act. Harry and Edna somewhat confront with the fear of the death and ultimately decide to arrive at their friends as an escapement from it.

Tobias' gun, which proves to be ineffectual, is the weapon of death. In act two, Julia rushes into the room and brings his gun thereafter threatening Harry and Edna to leave her room. But they do not take her seriously, and she does not really use it, either. Tobias grabs from her and still she goes on demanding for it. Julia's confrontation with the intruders' presence is well reflected in her attempt of threatening them with the use of gun.

The characters in the play not only avoid others' desire, but also either deny or forget the bitter realities. Devastating event as Teddy's death indicates the extent to which they wish to avoid dealing with painful realities. Just as Tobias could not understand the cat, he neither understands the characters in the play nor gives them what they must need. He has inability to mourn or symbolize the event of teddy's death. Having falsely resumed her life by "forgetting" him, Agnes is a witness both to a presumed religious penance in Julia and an assumed infidelity on the part of Tobias. Her musings about the effects of Teddy's death also prompt a renewed interest in confronting the desire of other. Contrary to this, the space that has been paradoxically opened up in a house "full to bursting" (106) is an opportunity to mourn the loss of their child, however, Agnes and Tobias both have conceded to having a number of symptoms – Claire, Julia, Harry, and Edna – haunt the house in order to avoid the Thing, the unseen ghost of their dead child.

Pseudo Friendship and Nameless Terror

Harry and Edna, who are Agnes and Tobias' "best friends" (168) for forty years, arrive at theirs, in order to escape from the "nameless terror" and to get some

relief from it. They, who seem somewhat ill at ease, say that they felt alone and frustration; they were alone, but suddenly got frightened with nothing. They became quite hysteric, they were their best friends and couldn't get anywhere else. So they came to them, there. Putting their appeal to their friends thus:

EDNA (*through her sobbing*). WE WERE FRIGHTENED.

HARRY. There was nothing ... but we were scared.

(AGNES *comforts EDNA, who is in free sobbing anguish.*

CLAIRE *lies slowly back on the floor*).

EDNA. We ... were ... terrified.

HARRY. We were scared. (48-49)

Their presence is unwanted in their house; Julia, who is already 36, still shows her childish behaviour by making the repetitive demands of "her room" peopled with Harry and Edna. Tobias and Agnes look passive and unconcerned of them. Tobias remains awake all the night long, they can't sleep in the same bed. Agnes says: "There was a stranger in my room last night" (127). Agnes also cannot sleep well because of his "unfamiliar presence" (128) in her bed.

Agnes asks Tobias of the decision he made about Harry and Edna, but is responded with nothing more than the reflection of his confused mentality in his expression. And, when Harry asks several times whether Tobias really wants him and Edna, he would not have allowed it, Tobias, in turn, just delivers a long soliloquy making a dual verbal texture.

AND BY GOD YOU'RE GOING TO TAKE IT!

DO YOU HEAR ME?!

YOU BRING YOUR TERROR

AND YOU COME IN HERE

AND YOU LIVE WITH US!

YOU BRING YOUR PLAGUE!

I DON'T WANT YOU HERE!

I DON'T LOVE YOU!

BUT BY GOD ... YOU STAY!! (169)

Tobias becomes emotional and eventually hysterical, insists that Harry and Edna remain, though he confesses that he not honestly wants them to stay.

Agnes calls the terror/dread as disease—plague, and says that their best friends have come and brought the plague and poor Tobias has sat up all night and wrestled with the moral problem. But Tobias becomes frustrated and in anger says that he had not been wrestling with some abstract problem. There were people. Agnes finds only Claire immune to fight with the disease. She comments on Tobias's thought/decesion, "So, your night-long vigil, darling, your reasoning in the cold, pure hours, has been over the patient and not the illness. It is not Edna and Harry who have come to us--our friends--it is a disease" (158).

The sudden awareness of emptiness that shatters the habitual, comfortable complacency prevailing in the lives of Harry and Edna could well have proved contagious to the "mirror couple" with whom they seek refuge, because the same void fills the house of Agnes and Tobias, although they have not acknowledged its presence.

Parodic End

Unexpectedly, Harry and Edna decide to return their home, Tobias begs, even demands that they remain, though he does not want this burden and disruption. When, despite his desperate entreaties they insist on leaving, Agnes calmly remarks, at the end of the play, "Come now; we can begin the day", and satisfies that the "dark night

of terror” is safely passed. Agnes’ this closing speech, expressing wonder at the sun and exhorting the household to begin the day, seems ambiguous. We come to interpret this ambiguity: Albee could be indicating that the characters have found a new awareness and direction their search for more meaningful relationships, or that they are merely beginning the same routine, deception, insensitivity, and uninvolved.

But, as the play ends, on a Sunday morning, Tobias, Julia and Claire are all drinking. Even Julia has taken to drinking in the morning. Agnes comments the scene in a half-parodic lofty language:

AGNES. Well, I would seem to have three early-morning drinkers
 now. I hope, it won’t become a club. We’d have to get a license,
 would we not?

TOBIAS. Just think of it as very late at night.

AGNES. All right, I will. (176)

Although it is Sunday morning, the outcome appears unfavourable--the sunlight illuminates merely a continued repetition of the routine that governed them in the past--there has been no resurrection or renewal; the opportunity for salvation has been missed, and Tobias must now live on with the knowledge that he has failed that much of his life has been a sham. Agnes observes pessimistically near the end of the last at “[y]ou wait; and time happens. When you do go, sword ... shield ... finally ... there’s nothing there ... save rust; bones; and the wind” (171).

So nothing new happens more than the day itself at last. The same absurd routine--alcoholism, deception, misunderstanding, insensitivity and uninvolved--is beginning like the senseless work of mythical hero, Sisyphus (as Albert Camus writes in *The Myth of Sisyphus* 1940). The characters repeat the same meaningless, senseless, void world-- just making their lives a parody. Parody is taken of as imitation,

intended to ridicule or to criticize. There is the imitation of the same life what/how they were right in the beginning that merely ridicules and criticizes their past/daily routine. What the reader speculate of positive and improved livings is just a falsity. It makes nothing more than the parody that merely mocks and creates a fun of their repetitive business.

IV

CONCLUSION

Albee's plays generally deal with people's attempts to make sense for themselves of their senseless position in a senseless world. The play *A Delicate Balance* concerns with the hidden terrors that lurk just beneath the surface of seemingly placid every day life. The playwright examines illusion and loss in American families through the play that stood as a dark comic portrayal of modern angst.

The play concerns the failure relationship among family members and their closest friends. Albee's theme is that people often thoughtlessly espouse superficial values that later trap them in maintaining insincere relationships. Adjusting to appearances rather than to society they suffer through serious failures in communication and eventually lose any possibility of finding any gratifying emotional fulfillment.

In the play, all the characters struggle in the senseless atmosphere where pain, sterility, failure and frustration prevail. Even the value system of Marriage, friendship as established institutions of society do not provide any real meaning to them. Family relationship and friendship cannot be genuine bond but instead that make the characters isolated beings and alienate them. The characters are desperate and lonely even in the group.

Agnes and Tobias, the married couple, lack understanding, indulge in ineffective communication; neither of them realizes responsibilities and duties toward their family members and relatives. However, Agnes calls herself a balancer or fulcrum in keeping this family in shape (but, later comes to realize her position as fulcrum has produced a melancholic complacency in the family). The antagonistic

communication between Claire and Agnes, Julia and Agnes, and between Agnes and Tobias, their way of hiding truths, seeking comforts in appearance that tie them in fragile bond, bring additional complexities in their “delicate” family relations.

Tobias’ declining masculine role in the family and his act of violence of his cat in order to maintain his identity crisis not only indicates his terror of decision making but also his fantasy of killing a housemate for the sake of self. Claire’s drunkenness and Agnes’ madness, as they believe, helps in retaining their existence in the family. Claire, an early-morning drunk, does not like to call herself alcoholic, as she drinks willfully. The same to Julia, who faces the possibility of nothingness, returns to her parents; she says that she has not divorced her fourth husband but only has left. They see comforts in the illusionary and fantastic world so they create their own artificial beliefs and illusions which work as anesthesia against harsh reality.

Harry and Edna, who suffer from the “nameless dread”, decide to move in permanently with Tobias and Agnes, their best friends in the world, the presumption that their sameness, and the uncanny parallelism of their lives assure them a place in another “situated void”: the event of the terror they hoped to escape. The sudden awareness of emptiness that shatters the habitual, comfortable complacency prevailing in the lives of Harry and Edna, well proves contagious to the mirror couple with whom they sought refuge, because the same void fills the house of Agnes and Tobias, although they have not acknowledged its presence. When Tobias must decide whether to allow these friends to reside in his house, he confronts the dilemma of illusion versus reality in his own life: To reject them would be to admit that had wasted forty years in maintaining pseudo-friendship based primarily on proximity rather than reality, he implores them to stay. Harry, who has already looked deeply into the world, now knows better and rejects Tobias’ insincere plea.

Evasions in the guise of “making do” or “making it work” enable the four principal characters in the play to pretend to themselves and to one another that their family is a happy one, or at least quite average, because their relationships appear similar to those prevailing in many other families around them. When forced eventually to examine their fantasy worlds honestly, they discover them to be empty and meaningless, and they are left alone, deprived of their illusions, with some new and difficult truths to face and ponder –or reject.

Albee has focused our attention on the tragic gap between the human’s environment and the inner self, the growing alienation, failure to comprehend the fantastic complexities of modern life and finally the entry into a comfortable world of illusion as a desperate attempt to an alien world. To live this life there is need for artificial beliefs and illusions, which give relief, against harsh reality. After their epiphany Harry and Edna decide to return. On the other hand, Tobias is confused and uncertain and so returns at the play’s end to illusion; Agnes allows him that illusion because she knows that he wants and needs it, and she can live with it, too. Julia joins Claire for a drink, at the first time, which suggests that she may adopt her aunt’s solution of seeking oblivion to escape her problem.

It is Sunday morning; Agnes astonishes the wonder of daylight of the sun and hopes that it would bring order with it. Unlike she urges them to celebrate the day, nothing new happens--the sunlight illuminates merely a continued repetition of the routine that governed them in the past: deception, insensitivity, uninvolved, illusion, meaninglessness and absurdity. There has been no resurrection or renewal. Unlike the readers’ speculation, they are repeating the same past routine – the parody of their lives that mocks them ceaselessly -- the parody of their lives that creates fun

by ridiculing and criticizing boring repetitive businesses, which is the imitation of the lives of many prosperous American families.

The feeling of dread is caused not because they have violated the laws of god but because of meaningless world where they exist. A veneered surface of civility masks the terror beneath it. Harry and Edna are themselves symbols of nothingness, of despair, of spiritual nudity that infect the similar families--obsessed to existential inclination, incomprehensive to the "ideal" life--and haunt them ceaselessly like a ghost at the depth of their existence. They suffer too much from the dread-- the imminent approach of death and striking with the emptiness of lives based on appearances only, without any deeply rooted values or sincere feelings to sustain them. And the repetitive business goes on mocking itself just making a parody all the time.