

## FATALISM IN WAITING FOR GODOT

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### ABSTRACT

Waiting for Godot, a play by Samuel Beckett, is a play still waiting to end up but unending debates on its theme, characters, dramatic elements, etc fills the pages of research works and the dais with arguments and debates. The unending debates are due to its difference and this difference is the result of the playwright's indifference. Whenever, there were queries about the play, he had never given any solid answers to them and made people think in the way they wanted to think as Shakespeare did for the title of a play by giving a title "As You Like It." Since no meaning is given by the author, people start giving meaning in the ways they like and perhaps that was what the author had intended from his audience to make different meanings. Since, people make different meaning about the play, from this perspective it can be an existentialist play. Many interpret the play as an existentialist play, absurdist play, realistic play, etc on the basis of its theme, but this article refutes to accept the play as an existentialist play from the theme. Existentialism emphasizes that the people to make their own meaning to their life and live life accordingly. But, on the basis of the characters and their roles taken, is this an existentialist play? This article argues that the play as a whole is not an existentialist play but a play on human destiny to live between two ends without the ability to make inclined to one of the two ends till death. After and before death, that is too again uncertain and thus human predicament is to wallow on a fire that is never quenched and nor the worms (human beings) in it never die. Therefore, the play is the play about human predicament determined by destiny. This article argues and elaborates this view.

**Keywords:** Existentialism: a philosophy that emphasizes an individual's role in making life meaningful rather than giving importance to destiny or god. Pozzo, Lucky, Vladimir and Estrogan: the characters in the play 'Waiting for Godot' of Samuel Beckett Positivism: a philosophical theory seeking explanations to events in order that the underlying laws can be discovered.

### Introduction

Every individual is in a quest for something or someone. The search for money, power, love, god, peace, happiness, or biological wants never ends till death and after which too no clue. Whoever exists, they

are indispensable from searching and that this is true even for those who had gone for renunciation; their life is not free from searching. Thus, as long as one exists, they cannot escape from this misery but to this search they associate some meaning or add purpose to the objects they search but this meaning changes and in times, their search is abandoned and frustration resulted in the process of searching. This abandonment may either be transient or long lasting but many people could not stop continuing their search after a shorter or longer period depending upon the individual will power or nature. People are not constant in their behaviour but constantly changing. This inevitable change is emphasized by Heraclitus by his saying 'no one can ever step into the same river twice'. It implies the indispensability of change and without which there is no motion and thus life too. Many critics interpret Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* as an existentialist play; some attribute that to the playwright's intention of writing an existentialist play but is it really an existentialist play? Is the playwright's intention was to write an existentialist play? Is it not possible to go away from this proposition of the play as existentialistic, absurdist, or realistic? Is it not possible to interpret that as a play of fatalism? This article tries to discuss these.

### Existentialist Play

There are so many kinds of existentialism. *"According to existentialism, each man and woman creates the essence (meaning) of their life; life is not determined by a supernatural god or an earthly authority, one is free. As such, one's ethical prime directives are action, freedom, and decision, thus existentialism opposes rationalism and positivism."* (Meaning of Life)

### Discussion

According to the above meaning of existentialism, *Waiting for Godot* is an existentialist play as firstly Beckett openly resisted to equate Godot with God and secondly the characters make meaning of their own life and go according to their meanings. But, apart from waiting, what is the meaning or purpose of waiting? This is not expressed in the play and as such how can this be an existentialist play?

A section of critics associate Godot with God but the playwright refused to have intended of meaning to God. Once the creator's role is over s/he has no power to dictate the audience to think in the way s/he thinks and even the author himself/herself need not necessarily think in the same ways. Hence, once the audience watched the play, they would make meaning out of it and away from the author's intention on the basis of their experience and the inherent faculty in them. Therefore, leaving upon the author dead, if the audience think that Godot is God, the play cannot be an existentialist play.

The playwright had failed and refused to give any answer to all the queries about the play and that is the strategy he had used for making the audience got occupied in the search of meaning for the play according to their experiences and the available capacities. Since, people are individually different, they mean the play in different ways according to the way it is fitting their own experiences. Therefore, making meaning of the play, in the way people think, could have been done in an existentialist way but everyone need not mean in the same way and everyone need not and cannot accept the mean in a way dictated by others. Is the meaning accepted to everyone?

For some existentialists, we exist in this world and our philosophy should be limited to living and should not go investigating something which can never be complete during one's life time. We are not expected to waste our time and energy in searching for the answers to questions which we can never get. After death or before birth, purpose of life, existence of God, etc. are not in the preview of our life and cannot be comprehended as we don't have that faculty to comprehend. It is the wastage of time and living and the purpose can never be accomplished. It is said that Beckett in an interview expressed that Godot is not God. Therefore, for the dramatist it is not God but since the drama has never told anywhere that 'who was Godot' the audience could apprehend 'Godot' as God and that is their individual freedom to think in a way they like. Once, the art leaves the hands of the artist, the audience are not under the control of the artist and thus the author becomes dead for Roland Barthes says once the work reaches the reader or audience there is no role of author left. So, none can limit the thinking of the audience and not even the author as the author may mean

things differently at different times or situations. Since, the term 'godot' seems to be made meaningful by approximating the term to 'god' as the term resembles the term 'god'. Human mind tends approximate the incomplete things to something similar and makes it complete. *"This is the central principle of gestalt psychology according to which human mind is able to acquire and maintain meaningful perceptions in an apparently chaotic world."*(Gestalt Psychology) Therefore, it is expected that associating the term 'godot' to god is simply due to its similarity of the terms and there is no waiting for god in the play. Therefore, the play need not imply a didactically that people should not wait nor seek guidance from supernatural powers or god but to live on their own. To say more, from the characters Vladimir and Estragon, some assume that people are given a lesson through the play not to spend time in a meaningless ways for something that is uncertain but to move on as Pozzo and Lucky. Thinking in this way, the play falls under the category of an existentialist play. But no one is sure whether godot is coming on one of the following days and no one can make a foolproof assumption that Godot is not coming at all. This didacticism fails when one supposes that Godot is surely coming on the basis of the information given by the messenger boy and there is no clue to show that the information received is a hoax. Thus, the didactic instruction becomes ineffective as the two characters waiting is meaningful. So, the meaning given in a didactic way by some critics that their search is a useless search and people should not be engaged in a search as in the drama cannot be and need not be the meaning intended by the dramatist or the real essence of the play or all the audience's understanding of the play.

Some more questions need answers, such as: 'Are the characters making meaning to their life and moving ahead?', 'Are the characters moving on their own in this play?' and 'Are the human moving on their own in this world?'

The characters put themselves on waiting – as in the case of Vladimir and Estragon or moving- as Pozzo and Lucky, and thus for them that waiting or moving gives a purpose. Being engaged in an activity by making meaning out of absurdity brings the play under the purview of existentialism. But, do the characters show that they live a meaningful life without despair or anxiety? It is not so, as there is hopelessness in their hope and hope in their hopelessness. Sometimes, they find it meaningful to wait and some other times it is not so. So, in absurdity, they are unable to make a concrete meaning but in hypothetical and fluctuating manner between two poles. So, the existentialistic approach fails here.

Here is another simple approach in the effort of fitting the play in fatalism. Fatalism is a philosophy that tells us that we are chained by the destiny and human will has no place in our life and if something happened out of will that can be only a coincidence. Everything is predetermined and events are thought to inevitable. Viewing 'Waiting for Godot' through fatalistic perspective, the character Pozzo's life is turned upside down that he had never willed nor did he has the control over it. He is destined to become a partial dependency to total dependency. This is the human predicament between birth and death, that is universal, unavoidable and pathetic.

Similarly, the answer for the question 'whether Godot would come?' can not be answered by anyone as it is determined by the destined forces for which we have no access nor a clue. Supernatural powers acting on people is destiny that is beyond human control. "Samuel Beckett has explicitly stated that the character Godot, in his classic play, Waiting For Godot, is not an allegory for God." (Monotony) But, two of them have been waiting and they were destined to wait. Pozzo and Lucky were not waiting, they were on motion and had hardly had any time to halt or wait as Pozzo was looking into his watch and saying 'still it is ticking' while searching for the lost watch. This means that still he has time in his life and wants to move further and moving further, in spite of troubles and impediments, after having become blind. So, these people are destined to move further and farther but others to linger in waiting for Godot. Thus, godot is something, that may be money, power, love, position, peace, supernatural powers, etc. or to simply put it human wants. This predicament is the human destiny. There are perspectives on existentialist, absurdist, idealist,... but this fatalist approach tells that the human destiny is to wait for something without humans knowing the purpose of waiting or hope of finding; what to wait for; how long to wait; whether the person would achieve what is waited for; ... there are no certain answers common for all. For one it happens in one way and for another in another way. People state proposition and for some the proposition goes as proposed and some others it goes

otherwise. Some uphold the maxim "truth will triumph" but in reality it may or may not be true and whether positive or negative, though people may hold credit for some or many, but the credit goes to only destiny.

If one looks from the point of existentialism, life is meaningful to people and this meaning is associated with the individuals as every individuals make different meaning to people. Therefore, calling Waiting for Godot an existentialist play is a meaning given by few people and need not necessarily the same for all. As Shakespeare asks the audience to give a title "As You Like It" Beckett too for the meaning of the play 'Waiting for Godot'. Therefore, this play could be well interpreted using fatalistic approach. Humans know that they are fluctuating between "To be or not to be". It is the dialectical and diabolical condition of human beings and they expect the most favourable one and to avoid the negative side they seek the supernatural powers or guidance or assistance from spiritual leaders or conman.

In waiting for Godot, Vladimir and Estragon often cheerfully wait and within no time fall into despair but still do not lose hope forever. They are the exemplum of human predicament in this worldly life; humans are living in hope and dying an undying death in despair. The dilemma becomes a part of human mind and never allows it to be stable. Why?

Human is a part of the universe and more specifically a part of the earth which is in constant motion driven by many forces- the centrifugal and centripetal forces acting between earth and sun. Other heavenly bodies, small and big subject on earth and subjected by the earth with their forces. Humans, being a part of the earth and part of the universe, are subject to the forces in body and mind. Being a passenger in a high speed earth which is spinning and passing many moving objects, humans are unable to perceive what are around and what are moving around due to constant and high speed motion. This high speed movement makes one disabled from being fixed to one thought for a longer period and in the meanwhile one is perplexed, perturbed, disturbed and disappointed by the distracting thoughts. This causes depression to the extent of renunciation, isolation, committal of suicide or seeking someone or seeking some powers to rescue them.

### Conclusion

In Godot too, there is a search that haunts human life and that goes futile. There is a search for Godot with an assumption that something such as Godot or someone as Godot is there and will come. The faith is not strong but that is not completely lost; their hope enables them to wait in the following days and despair leads them to attempting for suicide either by hanging or jumping down from the Eiffel Tower. Everything is dialectical- the two forces tearing humans apart till death while keeping them alive. Man's constant and unending search for something on this planet has been depicted in this play. Everything that exists in this world seeks to find something for their bodily or mental needs. But, one's needs whether would be fulfilled or not, depends not on one's own will but forces beyond them. Estragon and Vladimir will meet out of their own will or desperate, but the accomplishment depends upon the forces beyond them- destiny. The moment humans are thrown on earth, fate determines his life between two ends and that continues till they are thrown on earth after the end of life. Thus, Waiting for Godot is a play about human destiny.

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