

Existential Alienation in the Modern Society: Albert Camus' *Caligula* as Paradigm

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Abstract

Existentialism is one of the modern literary movements under the avant-garde umbrella of the 20th century and its impact was felt in 20th century France and Germany but it became more prominent in Europe after the World War II. Existentialism emphasizes the fact that there are no longer any fixed standards or values by which one can live. Each person must therefore create his own code of conduct regardless of conventions imposed by the society.

At the mention of the term: 'existentialism', a certain other word may come to mind for most consummate theatre artists: freedom. Freedom thus becomes an inestimable mode of existentialism. With further dissection of the concept, we find that the existentialist man finds himself adrift in an enigmatic world with freedom at his disposal, yet he is in chains. He further realises that he has to make a choice, be it good or bad, and that failure to make a choice is a choice already made. The result of any choice the existentialist man makes will always yield a result, whether ugly or beautiful. However, the existentialist man is ready to accept the responsibility for his choices and actions.

Apart from freedom, choice and responsibility, other modes characterise the existential man and stir him towards the goal of living an authentic life that does not conform to societal standards, the dictates of authority, tradition or custom. His individualism, subjectivity and entrenched philosophy of the absence of God in his life will enable him be that true, creative, full-fledged human being in the world that he must be careful not to conform to. The factors which enable the existentialist alienate himself from the world to benefit his philosophy include: freedom, choice,

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commitment, responsibility, moral individualism, subjectivity, anguish, death, among others.

Jean-Paul Sartre is a strong proponent of existentialism as he gave it the solid footing it has today. He speaks extensively on being, freedom and nothingness and the impetus to write extensively on nothingness was obviously born out of the devastating effects and disillusionment the World War II brought to the world. Sartre believes that freedom is accompanied by a heavy and inescapable responsibility and a disturbing anguish. This paper focuses on x-raying the theory of existentialism as a literary concept or movement while bringing its characteristic modes to the limelight and alluding to a typical existentialist play: 'Caligula' by Albert Camus as a case study.

Introduction

Existentialism is one of the modern anti-realistic movements under the avant-garde umbrella of the 20th century. It is anti-realistic in the sense that it is one movement that revolts against realism and its conventional disposition. The impact of Existentialism was fully felt in the 20th century France and Germany, and became more prominent in Europe after the World War II.

The term 'existentialism', etymologically speaking, derives from the word 'existence'. However, Existentialism as a literary movement is one that is restricted to human beings only; while excluding other objects existing in nature. Existentialists generally feel that those objects in nature do not exist; rather, they simply just are. In other words, stones, trees, rocks, waterfalls, clouds among others do not 'exist'; they simply just 'are'. Existentialism can, therefore, be seen as a philosophy of human existence, preoccupied mainly with what it means for human beings to exist. In this philosophy, Sartre thinks that existence precedes essence. To exist implies being personally involved in what is going on in life as a participant rather than as a passive spectator. When someone exists, the person is committed to a freely chosen way of life. To Sartre, 'The being that exists is man. Man alone exists.

Trees are, but do not exist. Angels are, but they do not exist. God is, but he does not exist' (1956:215). Man thus becomes the only existing entity. Other objects and even the gods are devoid of existential existence.

The Rise of Existentialism

Certain factors led to the emergence of existentialism. Industrialisation was one of them. With industrial revolution, a lot of machinery came into existence. Science and technology began to threaten the existential essence of man. The threat engendered the irrational thinking of man to challenge rigorous scientific determinism. This consequently paved way for existentialism, which projected, means judgment of his affairs as a creative being. The devastating effects of the Second World War on man was yet another. The use of dangerous arsenal including grenades, guns, bombs and other war implements presented the world as chaotic. He felt that his freedom in the society was jeopardized. However, man still sought out a means to struggle to keep himself safe and confident against all odds.

Furthermore, the rebellion against religion was another factor. Existentialists decipher that if, with the presence of God who man believed should be his saviour, they still wallowed in anguish, he being here is not worth it. Because God has failed to take care of man's situation, man must find a way of saving himself by being the god of himself. Existentialism thus presents an imperfect world with man in an absurd, godless universe where he has to make his own choices and be ready for the consequences.

Philosophers and forerunners of Existentialism

This philosophical 'ism' has quite a good number of exponents. German philosophers like Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Karl Jaspers (1768-1860), Frederick Nietzsche (1844-1990), Gabriel Marcel (1880-1973), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), Albert Camus (1913-1960) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) are equally worth mentioning.

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Existentialist philosophers, however, have the reputation of being philosophers of the absurd. Frederick Nietzsche was particularly interested in ecclesiastical ethics. A Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard is, however, referred to as the father of modern existentialism. Kierkegaard expounded major themes of existentialism while paying keen attention to man. It is important to know that, of all the philosophers and forerunners of existentialism, it was the French philosopher and playwright, Jean-Paul Sartre, that gave the movement its solid footing. He gave it the definite form it has today. Sartre made existentialism so popular that the term became so synonymous with his name and philosophy.

Existentialism began in Denmark with Kierkegaard, but it got to Germany and reached its highest point in France with the works of Sartre. It flourished mainly in Germany and France as most major existentialists are from these two countries. Works of Sartre, like *Being and Nothingness* and *Existentialism is Humanism*, reveal a good deal of what existentialism is all about. Sartre, whose central conception is man's freedom, however, seems almost obsessively drawn to literature of imprisonment, confinement, enclosure or entrapment. Some existentialist plays by him include: *No Exit* (1944), *The Flies* (1943), *The Respectful Prostitute* (1946), *The Condemned of Altona* (1959), and *Men without Shadows* (1946).

The Concept of Existentialism

Existentialism is a philosophical movement which holds that human beings are fully responsible for creating their lives, and the meaning they attribute to them. Man is therefore faced with choices made for himself. Frederick Nietzsche's 'God is Dead' philosophy throws more light on the above. Man is presented as willing to attempt even the impossible, regardless of any frontiers, because man took charge of himself having believed that God died the day Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross of Calvary. It is no

surprise then why many existentialist proponents declare the non-existence of God.

Heidegger puts it simply: 'God is, but he does not exist' (1965:215). Jean-Paul Sartre emphasizes existence as a form of humanism as it explores human freedom, choice and responsibility. It x-rays man's concrete existence which naturally precedes his essence. Humans have no particular essence of nature; rather, they forge for themselves whatever values they wish to live with.

It is important to know that existentialism peers keenly into human existence and upholds men and women possessing the freedom to be the kind of people they want to be, and probably come up to an extent with the kind of universe they wish to abide in. However, a little problem sets in here. In a bid to explore our freedom, we inevitably come in the way of the freedom of others. Others here could imply social tenets for organisation and because the society is strong, conflict sets in. For Sartre, man's freedom is the fighting secret of the gods. That secret which Zeus, in the play, *The Flies*, is so reluctant to share with Orestes is a keen example. The people of Argos do not know that they are free because their eyes are veiled by Jupiter so that they do not see their freedom. However, Orestes is able to remove the veil and grasp the reality of human freedom. In other words, the freedom of man is even a threat to the gods.

The gods want man to remain pawns in their hands who would bow to whatever dictates they put forward. The idea is equally attributable to Jean-Paul Sartre's most popular quotation that: 'Hell is other people' in his *No Exit*. It is not hell that is decried as a condemnation to the self under the judging eye of another consciousness but it is life itself and the presence of others that is hell. Every character is trapped in a private world of guilt and shame and seeks solace by turning to others only to come face to face in their severe glance and cruel judgment just as is seen in the same play where three characters are trapped in an empty room and have to put up with a cyclic tormenting of each other.

The fact that existentialism projects individuals as having the full responsibility of creating meanings for their own lives is

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opposed to more conventional philosophers that seek to discover ultimate order in metaphysical principles through empirical means. Corroborating this, Edwin Wilson posits that existentialism 'Focuses on the fact that there are no longer any fixed standards or values by which one can live...each person must create his own code of conduct; regardless of conventions imposed by the society' (2001:A2-1). Wilson thinks that it is only with this mindset that man can exist as a responsible and creative being. Characters who take this course of action are usually caught in a cruel dilemma of choosing between living on their own terms or ceasing to live at all.

The idea of choosing, regardless of societal conventions, is equally supported by Oscar Brockett et al. They posit thus: 'Human beings are condemned to choose their own values and live by them whether or not these values are accepted by others' (2004:431). In his elucidation of Jean-Paul Sartre's argument, Oscar Brockett et al emphasize man's independence of gods and social laws when they lucidly state that: 'There are no universal and absolute moral laws or values... Therefore, each man is free since he is not bound to God or to a set of verifiable principles governing behaviour, and is responsible only to himself' (2004:393).

Existentialists simply try to explain that in this chaotic world we live in, man would fail if he decides to look up to others or to God. Hence, man should place himself first and be ready to cope with the consequences of his choices be they good, bad or ugly.

Man and the World, his Abode

Man and the world he lives in are inseparably linked. In Heidegger's book *Being and Time* (1973), he describes man as a 'being-in-the-world'. This implies that man is unavoidably linked with the world through his body. It is through his body that he maintains contact with the world and interacts with it. Although human existence is experienced in the world, man is not

completely part of the world. He must be on his guard against the tendency to be completely drawn into the world. Without the world, man would not exist and vice-versa because man uses the world to realise his possibilities and attain self-fulfilment.

Though existentialism emphasizes, to a great extent, the individualistic nature of man, it still does not undermine the fact that other people exist; hence, the individual is not alone in the world. Though he discovers he exists in the midst of other people, he has his own life to live and death to die; every human is a peculiar case in history and thus, nobody can live or die for the other; the individual has to face his fears.

To submit one's life to the dictates of another is to live an unauthentic life. It is apparent that existentialists hint the subtle social nature of man by describing him as a being with others but stress even to the point of exaggeration, his individuality and uniqueness. The importance of 'self' is stressed in Sartre's postulation that 'without the world there is no selfhood, no persons; without selfhood...there is no world' (1956:104).

Existentialist Modes of Alienation

Jean-Paul Sartre, the French philosopher and dramatist, in his early philosophic work, *Being and Nothingness*, conceives of humans who create their world by rebelling against authority and accepting personal responsibility. He believes that individuals must rely on their creative power, rather than on social or religious authority. A number of the existential modes of alienation abide. They manifest in the life of the existential character who detaches himself from the world. Some of the commonest modes are treated below.

Freedom

This is the heart of existentialism. Man becomes truly a man only when he can choose actions that will make his freedom more enjoyable. The existentialists' concept of freedom is quite different from the practical concept. Freedom does not necessarily entail one's ability to attain one's aims; rather, the formula to be free is the disposition one has to make any choice at all one wishes to

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make. Success is not essential to freedom. In fact, Sartre sees it in the negative light. He sees it as a capacity for self-determination and self-detachment. With it, man cannot be identified with anything or any way of life. Since he possesses the capacity of self-withdrawal, he can always say no to any way of life.

According to Sartre, 'nothingness provides the foundation for freedom' (1965:18). Freedom is, therefore, bounded by nothing. Merleau-Ponty, however, criticizes Sartre for exaggerating human freedom to the point of making it absolute. For him, 'freedom for humans should be situated. Making it absolute is impossible' (1920:109). In Sartre's essay, *L'Existentialisme, est un Humanisme*, he explains that in the pursuit of freedom, man should recognize that his own freedom depends on the freedom of other people and vice-versa. He posits thus:

In our search for freedom, we discover that it depends on the freedom of others and that the freedom of others depends on us... as soon as there is commitment, I am obliged to want the freedom of others at the same time that I want my own freedom. I cannot take my freedom as an end without also taking that of others as an end (1946:85).

Choice

Choice is inseparable from freedom. It is the concrete actualisation of freedom. It is one of the most prominent tendencies of existentialism. Human beings do not have fixed nature like plants and animals; rather, each individual makes choices that create his or her own nature. Choice is inevitable to man as he cannot refuse to choose because refusal to choose is itself a choice. For Sartre, freedom is the freedom of choosing. 'Not to choose is in fact to choose not to choose' (1956:483). In the same vein, John Joharri posits: 'Choice should be right and not wrong. In as much as a right choice makes man free, a wrong choice causes his enslavement' (573:1987).

Freewill

This implies that whatever is done is done on the individual's own volition. He is not forced to determine his being and explore his freedom. His style, whether enthusiastic or full of tardiness, is totally his own making.

Commitment

This entails that man should not be afraid to commit himself to any endeavour or action. Freedom must be committed in action. If one seeks freedom and has no commitment to back it up, one's freedom is not valid. This can be likened to a man who tries to grasp freedom in its totality and therefore decides not to get married. He probably learns that his girlfriend is pregnant by him and then resorts to abortion rather than marriage. There is no commitment to his action.

Responsibility

This x-rays fact that man's freedom is unavoidably accompanied by a heavy responsibility. Responsibility implies that man is responsible for how he uses his freedom and what he makes of himself. His actions may get him to suffer loneliness, but he has no regrets at all. Death may even be the result, but he does not mind. Jesus Christ who died on the cross had his values antithetical to the values of many around him, but he took bold steps. Instead of living in their terms, he ceased to live at all. Even as he was crucified he neither regretted his actions, nor felt a sense of guilt.

'*Prometheus Bound*' is a play by Aeschylus. It is not an existentialist play; rather, Prometheus, its hero, possesses a strong existentialist spirit. Prometheus takes a bold step of stealing fire from the abode of the gods and bringing it to man. He falls out with Zeus but he does not regret his actions. He has taken the step and is ready to accept the responsibility despite the fact that Zeus imprisons him in chains. Just like Winnie who is buried up to her waist and then to her neck in Beckett's '*Happy Days*', Prometheus uses verbal rhetoric in a bid to suppress the physical oppression of the prevailing situation. The play is essentially a play of refusals as

the hero receives a series of offers which he indignantly refuses. The refusals are choices on the hero's part. In Sartre's *No Exit*, Garcin takes drastic decisions of deserting the army during the World War II. He openly cheats on his wife and does not give a hoot and, when torture comes, he takes it head on without guilt. He blatantly says: '...Well, let's get on with it,' even as the curtain falls and the vicious torturing cycle continues behind it.

Moral Individualism

Soren Kierkegaard reacts against tradition by insisting that the highest goal for the individual is to find his or her own vocation. Moral choice or stance apparently involves an objective judgment of what is right and wrong. The existentialists, however, have accepted that no objective or rational basis can be found for moral decisions. Man should follow his heart, as there is no God. Existentialism eschews any notion of moral standards.

Subjectivity

Existentialism is more interested in subjectivity than in objectivity. With Kierkegaard, for instance, the question is not what objective truth is, but what the truth is for each individual. Existentialists have insisted that personal experiences are essential to arriving at truth. The understanding of a situation by the person involved in it is obviously superior to that of the objective observer. As a result of their thought, most existentialists have deliberately been unsystematic in the exposition of their philosophies, as they prefer to express themselves in aphorisms, parables and the likes.

Despite their anti-rationalistic approach, they cannot be said to deny all validity to rational thought. However, they believe that the questions in life are not accessible to science and that one cannot arrive at the degree of first-hand information another got in a direct experience, no matter the empirical means they both followed. Personal experience is, therefore, the harbinger of ultimate of truth.

Auguish

Auguish is a common factor in existentialism. It is a feature of human existence. Sartre thinks that when man sees the radical nature of freedom with its concomitant responsibility, he comes to realise that freedom is a heavy burden. He is seized with auguish and tries in vain to run away from it. It usually sets in with deep reflection which in turn helps us realise that we do not know the meaning and purpose of our existence. There are no answers to our questions about our existence. It is just us bemoaning our sad plight. In *No Exit*, the characters are trapped in a cell-like room which is a symbol of living hell of ceaseless judgment. Though conventional torture instruments are absent, atrocious tortures of the mind abide. We find that the inmates themselves are their own torturers.

Death

This features prominently in existentialism. In Koestenbaum's article, 'The Vitality of Death', some contrasting notions on death are articulated by two major scholars. While Heidegger thinks that death is a meaningful part of life, which removes meaning from human existence, he affirms the positive value of death in relation to human life. Sartre refutes any such positive value and maintains that death is totally absurd and renders life meaningless. He criticizes Heidegger's view that death reveals to us our finitude. While Heidegger is optimistic about death, Sartre, on the contrary, is pessimistic. This is because, since death is a direct negation of man's strongest instincts of self-preservation and desire for continued existence, how can that which destroys be said to be meaningful in relation to that which it destroys? With careful examination of the issue, it reveals that the awareness of the inevitability of death can and does have some good effect on human life in terms of the way it is lived (1964:139).

In the same vein, Koestenbaum posits: 'The person who is aware of his death and the consequent limit to his time on earth will thereby concentrate on essentials. He will not waste time on useless details' (1964:166). Hazel Barnes maintains also that for

finite creatures as we are, with all the limitations that we have, the realisation that we shall die someday makes the problem of life more bearable. According to him: '...to be compelled to live on forever with all our finite limitations except morality, would be in very truth the hell...' (1967:483).

***Caligula* as an Epitome of Existentialism**

The works of the French writer, Albert Camus (1913-1960), are usually associated with existentialism because of the prominent relationship with absurdity and futility of life, the indifference of the universe among other themes. His ideas are quite clear in his legendary essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, which is in line with the existential thought. Man is portrayed in the essay as having an unquenchable desire to understand the world. Sisyphus, the tyrant, according to the Greek myth, was condemned for eternity. According to Camus, 'The gods had condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly roll a rock to the top of a mountain whence it would fall back of its own weight... There is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labour' (1955:110).

Caligula chronicles the escapades of a Roman Emperor named Caius Cesar. The tyrannical emperor was nicknamed 'Caligula' as a young boy by Roman legionaries who were fond of him. He ascended the throne after Tiberius, his father. Caligula expresses his boundless liberty in his administration of Rome as empire when we see him delight in the bloody execution of both high and low Roman citizens, whether or not they are guilty. He incessantly insults his physical appearance of the goddess, Venus; mercilessly scorns his subjects, takes other men's wives at will, creates artificial famine and even strangles his own dear wife Caesonia. Buried neck deep in these despicable actions in the course of his leadership, he ends up being alienated, and is eventually destroyed.

'Power', according to Lord Acton, 'tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts absolutely'. In Caligula's case, power corrupted him absolutely. Though he enjoyed unlimited power like

other emperors before him, he took his too far, even as young as he was. His regime was likened to a reign of terror without parallel in the whole of Roman history; hence, Cherea's worry in the play: 'True, it is not the first time Rome has seen a man wielding unlimited power, but it's the first time he sets no limits to his use of it and counts mankind and the world we know for nothing' (1984:626).

Freedom, which is the crux of the matter, is sought by Caligula in all ramifications. He enjoys the aura that comes with it - its boundlessness. He shares this feeling of his with Cherea:

...I hate you your kind because you are not free. You see in me the one free man in the whole Roman Empire. You should be glad to have at last among you an emperor who points the way to freedom (1984:624).

Caligula further shares this idea with Scipio when he says: 'I've come to see the uses of supremacy. It gives impossibilities a run. From this day on, so long as life is mine, my freedom has no frontier' (1984:624).

The existentialist spirit urges man to explore his world limitlessly. Both the possible and impossible are yearning to be tried out, and Caligula is indeed an embodiment of this thought. Many people attribute Caligula's strange disappearance from the palace to his grief as a result of the death of his beloved sister, Drusilla. But when Helicon seeks to enquire about his bizarre disappearance for three days, the following dialogue ensues:

Helicon:... You've been away for quite a while.

Caligula: It was hard to find.

Helicon: What was hard to find?

Caligula: What I was after, the moon.

Helicon: What?

Caligula: Yes, I wanted the moon (1984:621).

Caligula further corroborates his weird action saying: 'I suddenly felt a desire for the impossible. That's all' (1984:621).

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Caligula is as free as the air and he basks in his freedom by taking choices of action regardless of its rightness or wrongness. The choices make up the being in question and concretise his freedom. The patricians and some other Roman citizens are highly agitated by Caligula's outrageous choices to deal with them without clemency and to think about how to render him powerless in order to save their lives. First Patrician says:

He confiscated your property, patricians. He killed your father, Scipio. He's taken your wife from you, Octavius, and forced her to work in his public brothel. He has killed your son, Lepidus. I ask you gentlemen, can you endure this? (1984:626).

Caligula basks in the freedom of his limitless powers to the detriment of his people. When man is condemned to be free as Sartre insinuates, we come in the way of other peoples' freedom in a bid to enjoy ours. After Caligula has fulfilled his sexual desires for the wife of Mucus, whom he commanded Mucus to release to him, he says:

Mucus, I return your wife with many thanks...after all, I haven't so many ways of proving I am free. One is always free at someone else's expense. Apply this principle to your jealousy, and you'll understand better (1984:629).

The crazy tyrant not only decides to pull the wealth of all the patricians in Rome into the national treasury against their will, he creates artificial scarcity of food to assert his overwhelming authority and self-fulfilment. He says:

Famine begins tomorrow. We all know what famine means – a national catastrophe. Well, tomorrow there will be a catastrophe and I shall end it when I choose. (1984:629).

Caligula then commands his servants to close all the public granaries.

The influence of choice as a mode of existentialism is seen in Cherea urging Scipio to make a choice. Scipio does not know whether to be against Caligula any more simply because he finds something inside him that is akin to Caligula. Cherea replies by telling him that, 'there are times when man must make a choice. As for me I have silenced in my heart all that might be akin to him' (1984:640). This corroborates the existentialist notion that one must choose because one cannot say that one refuses to choose because refusing itself is a choice.

Exploration of mass freedom is immediately followed by responsibility. The existentialist character does not run away from his responsibility but bears the brunt without guilt. Caligula is discussing some issue and finds Mereia, an old patrician, ingesting the liquid content of a flask which we later find out is medication for the old man's asthma. Caligula accuses him of trying to take antidote in order to dispel whatever poison he thought Caligula may have given him. Caligula finds this derogatory and therefore kills Mereia outrightly without hearing his own side of the story. After murdering him, he goes ahead to forcefully pour poison into Mereia's mouth. It is only after Mereia's death that he inquires about the content of the flask. Even after finding out the truth from Ceasonia, he does not give a hoot about what he has done. He says:

No matter. It all comes to the same thing in the end...Remove that body to begin with. I should say it's rather a beastly sight (1984:631).

He feels no sense of guilt, and takes responsibility for his action fully. Though Caesonias has always been supportive of him right from the onset in his execution of his gory escapades, he suddenly decides that she has overstayed her welcome. He kills her and is willing to accept responsibility. Tightening his grip around her neck he says: 'But for this freedom, I'd have been a contented

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man. Thanks to it, I have won the godlike enlightenment of the solitary' (1984:646).

It is clear from the above that Caligula is alienated. He is estranged even when he is with people. He is lonely and this loneliness arises from the emphasis existentialism places on individuality and also on subjectivity. His aloofness is brought to the limelight when he says: 'I have an impression of an enormous voice when you and others are here and my eyes see nothing but empty air...only the dead are real. They are of my kind' (1984:645). It is equally apparent from Caligula's line that the solitude and alienation of an existentialist character is likened to that of the dead in the grave beyond.

'The God is dead' philosophy which was propounded by Frederick Nietzsche very much supports the moral individualism of existentialists. Sartre is an atheist and holds the same view. Caligula assumes a number of physical appearances of an outlandish disposition within the play text. Outside dressing up as a ballerina and performing a lousy dance which he forces everybody to commend, he once dresses up to assume the majesty of Venus, the Greek goddess. He made his subjects pray to him continuously until he bade them to stop. Scipio, who Caesonia describes as 'a bold young moralist', confronts Caligula and refers to his behaviour as blasphemous. According to Scipio, he was 'befouling heaven after blooding the earth'. Caligula responds saying: 'For someone who loves power, the rivalry of the gods is rather irksome. Well, I've proved to these imaginary gods that any man without previous training, if he applies his mind to it can play their absurd parts to perfection' (1984:635).

Caligula identifies the gods as being 'imaginary and, consequently, not there. With the belief that God does not exist, man therefore becomes the god of himself. Caligula further describes his actions as being artistically dramatic. Hear Caligula again: 'Any man can play lead in the divine comedy and become a god' (1984:635). Caligula describes the gods, if at all they are there, as hateful and stupid.

Anguish is an indispensable operative tendency of the alienated existentialist character, and Caligula's hideous acts bring him anguish. The realisation of the radicalism of Caligula's freedom hits him towards the end of the play, and he bemoans thus:

I have chosen a wrong path that leads to nothing. My freedom isn't the right one...nothing yet. Oh how oppressive is this darkness (1984:647).

He also laments on how his friend fails him:

You see, my poor friend, Helicon has failed you. I won't have the moon. Never! Never! But how bitter it is to know... (1984:646).

Death thus becomes his next companion. Caligula's subjects had earlier heeded the words of Cherea to calm their passion and not strike the nefarious emperor yet. His words read thus:

...A frontal attack is quite useless when one is fighting an imperial madman in the full flush of his power... Let's actively encourage him to carry out his wildest plans...then at last, a day will come when he is alone, a lonely man in an empire of the dead... (1986:627).

The day finally comes. There is no Caesonia for him, neither is there Helicon nor any patrician by his side. He alone faces his sad plight. His actions in the play alienate and consequently destroy him as he is killed by his conspirators, led by Cherea and Scipio.

Conclusion

When existentialist philosophers describe peculiar features of human existence, they tend to employ various means of drawing people's attention to them. They employ channels like plays, novels, drama, articles, and philosophical books among others. Albert Camus' *Caligula* falls into the play category. This article

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has used Camus' play to x-ray various modes of existentialism that abound. They include freedom, choice, freewill, moral individualism, anguish, responsibility, commitment, subjectivity, and death.

With existentialism, man finds himself adrift in an enigmatic world with freedom at his disposal, yet he is in chains. He finds that he has choices to make whether they are good or bad, and that failure to make a choice is a choice already made. He is willing to take full responsibility for the choices he has made. Whether the result of his actions yield agony or ecstasy, he accepts the responsibility of bearing the brunt because it is only then he can consider himself an individual living an unauthentic life. The opposite of this will mean a life that conforms to the dictates of tradition or custom.

Man needs to look into the effect of boundless freedom and check how much it has contributed to the development of the contemporary society. The right choices really need to be made. Students and lecturers abide in the university. If both parties seek boundless freedom, the aftermath will not at all be favourable. If students decide to relax they may end up suffering some academic problems. Lecturers, on the other hand, may be fired for their dereliction of duty. In as much as man should know his worth and build positive self-esteem as the Sophist motto - 'Man know thyself' encourages, he should not channel his freedom to disastrous escapades. Caligula was quite a young man as he died at the age of 29. He could have sublimated his excessive energy into worthwhile, creative activities. It is common knowledge that the tyrannical reign of Sani Abacha in Nigeria was not a very happy one as his dictatorial tendencies did not bring much success. The society and its conventions will remain the tougher party. We cannot fight it single-handedly - no matter how much we try. Our popular hapless salesman, Willy Loman, tried to, but did he succeed?

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