

**Existential Absurdity: A Cartesian Analysis of Man's Search for Meaning
in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Albert Camus' *The Stranger***



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**Existential Absurdity: A Cartesian Analysis of Man's Search for Meaning in Samuel
Becket's *Waiting for Godot* and Albert Camus' *The Stranger***

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

I hereby declare that this thesis is the student's own work and effort. All sources of information incorporated here have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted with my approval.



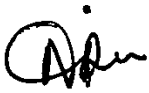
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DECLARATION

This thesis is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions.



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Abstract

This research explores the intersection of René Descartes' philosophical framework and the existential themes of absurdity and the search for meaning as depicted in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Albert Camus' *The Stranger*. By employing Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*, particularly his concepts of radical skepticism and self-certainty encapsulated in "*Cogito, ergo sum*" (*I think, therefore I am*), the study delves into the existential crises faced by the characters in these texts. In *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon's repetitive and uncertain waiting reflects Descartes' method of doubt, as they question the reality of their existence and the purpose of their actions. Similarly, Meursault in *The Stranger* embodies Cartesian self-awareness through his detachment from societal norms and his ultimate confrontation with the absurdity of life. Both texts illuminate the tension between the human desire for certainty and the recognition of life's inherent ambiguity.

This study argues that Descartes' philosophy provides a valuable lens for understanding the existential and absurdist dimensions of these literary works. By connecting Descartes' quest for certainty with the characters' navigation of doubt and absurdity, the research reveals a profound dialogue between philosophical inquiry and literary expression. Ultimately, this analysis underscores the enduring relevance of philosophical thought in grappling with the complexities of human existence.

Keywords: Existentialism, Absurdism, Radical Doubt, Cartesian Philosophy, Meaninglessness

Chapter 1: Introduction

The search for meaning in an indifferent and uncertain world is a central theme in existential and absurdist literature. Two seminal works that explore this theme are Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Albert Camus' *The Stranger*. These texts delve into the human condition through the lens of existential doubt, absurdity, and the search for purpose, all while confronting the reality of a universe that offers no inherent meaning. Both Beckett and Camus grapple with the existential question of how one can find purpose in a world that seems devoid of it. Their characters, Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*, and Meursault in *The Stranger*, embody the struggles of individuals caught between the desire for meaning and the overwhelming realization that meaning may not exist.

In terms of these existential dilemmas, René Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* offers a philosophical framework rooted in radical skepticism. Descartes famously doubted the certainty of everything except for the existence of the thinking self, encapsulated in his declaration, *Cogito, ergo sum* ("I think, therefore I am"). Descartes' approach to skepticism and the search for truth serves as a foundation for understanding the process of doubt and the search for certainty. However, unlike the existentialists, Descartes seeks to overcome doubt through reason and ultimately finds certainty in the self's existence. This research seeks to explore the intersections between Descartes' philosophy of doubt and the existential themes of absurdity in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Camus' *The Stranger*. By analyzing the characters' search for meaning in the context of Cartesian skepticism, this study will investigate how Descartes' radical doubt can be seen as a precursor to the existential questioning found in these literary works. The research will also examine how both Beckett and Camus challenge Cartesian certainty by presenting worlds in which meaning remains elusive and the search for purpose is a never-ending struggle. This

comparative analysis will provide insight into how existentialism and absurdism engage with Cartesian doubt, contributing to our understanding of the human quest for meaning in a world that offers none.

1.1 Background of the Study

The philosophical tradition of Cartesian doubt, introduced by René Descartes in his *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), revolutionized the way humans approach knowledge and certainty. Descartes' method of radical skepticism calls into question the reliability of sensory perception and the existence of the external world, ultimately asserting that the only indubitable truth is the existence of the self as a thinking being. His famous dictum, *Cogito, ergo sum* ("I think, therefore I am"), emphasizes the certainty of the self's existence through the act of thinking, marking the beginning of modern philosophy and the rationalist tradition. Descartes' work was pivotal in shaping the way subsequent philosophers, especially existentialists, would think about doubt, meaning, and existence.

In the 20th century, existentialist and absurdist writers like Samuel Beckett and Albert Camus responded to the modern condition of uncertainty and alienation. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1954) is a cornerstone of the Theatre of the Absurd, a genre that portrays human existence as meaningless and absurd. The play follows two characters, Vladimir and Estragon, who wait endlessly for someone named Godot, who may or may not ever arrive. Their futile waiting, marked by repetitive actions and existential questioning, illustrates the absurdity of life and the inability to find meaning in a world that offers none. Beckett's work reflects the existential belief that human beings are trapped in a meaningless universe, unable to find purpose through reason or traditional belief systems.

Similarly, Camus' *The Stranger* (1942) explores the theme of absurdity through the character of Meursault, a man who lives his life without concern for conventional moral or societal values. Meursault's indifference to life, death, and the expectations of others reflects Camus' philosophical concept of the absurd, the idea that life's inherent meaninglessness is both liberating and oppressive. In *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), Camus famously asserts that one must imagine Sisyphus, condemned to roll a boulder up a hill only for it to roll back down each time, as happy. This paradox highlights the absurdity of the human condition, where individuals must find meaning in the face of an indifferent and meaningless universe. While Descartes' philosophy is often seen as a precursor to modern rationalism and scientific inquiry, existentialist and absurdist thinkers like Beckett and Camus critique the very idea that reason can provide answers to life's fundamental questions. While Descartes sought to overcome doubt through reason and certainty, Beckett and Camus embrace the absurdity of doubt, presenting characters who live in a state of perpetual questioning without resolution. This research aims to bridge the gap between Descartes' rationalist philosophy and the existential and absurdist literature of Beckett and Camus, exploring how the search for meaning and the confrontation with doubt play out in both philosophical and literary contexts.

By examining the characters' struggles with doubt and meaning in *Waiting for Godot* and *The Stranger* through the lens of Descartes' radical skepticism, this study will offer a new perspective on the intersection of philosophy and literature. The research will explore how Descartes' skepticism provides a philosophical backdrop to the existential and absurdist themes in these works, contributing to the broader discourse on the human condition in the face of uncertainty and the search for meaning.

1.2 Problem Statement

While numerous studies have analyzed *Waiting for Godot* and *The Stranger* through existentialist and absurdist frameworks, there is limited research on how Cartesian doubt interacts with the themes of absurdity in these texts. This study addresses this gap by investigating how Descartes' philosophy informs the characters' existential struggles, particularly their search for certainty, meaning, and self-awareness in an absurd world.

1.3 Research Objective

The objective of this study is to explore the interplay between Cartesian doubt and existential absurdity in *Waiting for Godot* and *The Stranger*. It aims to:

- Analyze how the characters' actions and inactions reflect Cartesian doubt.
- Examine the philosophical tension between Descartes' rationalism and the absurdist themes in the texts.
- Evaluate the relevance of Descartes' *Cogito* in the context of existentialist literature.

1.4 Research Question

1. How does René Descartes' theory of Cartesian doubt illuminate the existential and absurdist themes in *Waiting for Godot* and *The Stranger*?
2. To what extent do the characters' struggles with meaning and existence align with or diverge from Cartesian rationalism?
3. How does Descartes' *Cogito* interact with the absurdist rejection of inherent meaning in these texts?

1.5 Research Rationale

The rationale for this study stems from the need to explore the intersection between Cartesian philosophy and existentialist literature, particularly through the works of Samuel Beckett and Albert Camus. While Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* is foundational to modern philosophy, especially in its treatment of radical skepticism and the quest for certainty, its influence on existential and absurdist literature has not been extensively explored. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Camus' *The Stranger* present characters who grapple with the absurdity of life and the search for meaning in a seemingly indifferent world, themes that resonate with Descartes' philosophical inquiry into doubt and existence. By analyzing these works in the context of Descartes' skepticism, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of how philosophical concepts such as doubt, the search for certainty, and the nature of existence manifest in literature. Furthermore, this study will contribute to the broader discourse on existentialism and absurdism by offering a novel perspective that links Cartesian philosophy with literary depictions of the human condition. By bridging philosophy and literature, this research seeks to illuminate how the philosophical quest for meaning intersects with the literary exploration of life's inherent absurdity, offering fresh insights into both philosophical and literary traditions.

1.6 Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, utilizing textual analysis and philosophical inquiry to explore the theme of existential absurdity in *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett and *The Stranger* by Albert Camus through the lens of René Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*. The primary aim is to investigate how Descartes' radical skepticism, particularly his concept of *Cogito, ergo sum* ("I think, therefore I am"), interacts with the existential and absurdist themes presented in these literary works. The methodology

will focus on examining the philosophical underpinnings of Descartes' doubt and how it resonates with or contrasts against the characters' search for meaning in Beckett's and Camus' texts.

1.7 Scope and Limitations

The scope of this study focuses on the philosophical and literary analysis of *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett and *The Stranger* by Albert Camus, examined through the lens of René Descartes' radical skepticism in *Meditations on First Philosophy*. The research will explore how Descartes' method of doubt and the affirmation of the self through thought intersect with existential themes of absurdity and the search for meaning in these works. However, the study is limited by its focus on only these two literary works, excluding other existentialist or absurdist texts, and relies on interpretative analysis, which may differ from other readings. Additionally, the research primarily centers on Cartesian philosophy, without engaging deeply with other philosophical traditions, and does not explore psychological or sociological perspectives, historical context, or the complexities of translation, which could provide further layers of understanding.

Chapter 2

2.1 Literature Review

The exploration of existentialism and absurdism in literature has long been a fertile ground for philosophical inquiry, particularly when juxtaposed with rationalist frameworks such as René Descartes' method of Cartesian doubt. Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) introduces a systematic approach to skepticism, wherein he questions all beliefs that could possibly be doubted, seeking an indubitable foundation for knowledge. His conclusion, *Cogito, ergo sum* ("I think, therefore I am"), asserts the self's existence as the only certainty. While Descartes' rationalism seeks clarity and certainty, existentialist and absurdist thinkers like Albert Camus and Samuel Beckett confront the uncertainty and meaninglessness of human existence, creating a philosophical tension that resonates in their works.

Albert Camus' philosophy of the absurd, as articulated in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), challenges traditional frameworks that seek to impose meaning on life. Camus argues, "The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world" (Camus 28). This tension between humanity's search for meaning and the indifference of the universe is central to his novel *The Stranger* (1942). The protagonist, Meursault, embodies the absurdist worldview through his detachment from societal norms and his confrontation with death. His refusal to adhere to conventional morality or to fabricate meaning in his life illustrates Camus' assertion that "living is keeping the absurd alive" (Camus 53). Meursault's ultimate acceptance of the absurd, as seen in his final moments, underscores Camus' belief in embracing life without illusions. Similarly, Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1953) reflects the absurdist condition through its minimalist structure and cyclical narrative. The play revolves around Vladimir and Estragon,

who wait endlessly for the mysterious Godot, who never arrives. This act of waiting, devoid of resolution or purpose, exemplifies the absurdity of human existence. Beckett's characters repeatedly question their actions, memories, and even the passage of time, reflecting a profound epistemological uncertainty. As Vladimir remarks, "We wait. We are bored. No, don't protest, we are bored to death, there's no denying it" (Beckett 42). This boredom and futility mirror the existential struggle to find meaning in an indifferent world, aligning with Camus' description of the absurd as a condition that must be faced without hope or despair. While existentialist and absurdist philosophies reject inherent meaning, they share significant overlaps with Cartesian doubt. Descartes' radical skepticism, which questions the reliability of sensory perceptions and the existence of the external world, introduces a level of uncertainty that resonates with the existentialist condition. Descartes himself acknowledges the destabilizing nature of his method, writing, "I will suppose... that some malicious demon of the utmost power and cunning has employed all his energies to deceive me" (Meditations 15). This acknowledgment of doubt as a fundamental aspect of human cognition parallels the existentialist embrace of uncertainty as an inescapable reality. However, where Descartes seeks to resolve doubt through reason, existentialist and absurdist thinkers, such as Camus and Beckett, accept doubt as a defining feature of existence.

The parallels between Cartesian doubt and absurdism are evident in both *The Stranger* and *Waiting for Godot*. In *The Stranger*, Meursault's indifference to societal norms and his rejection of traditional values reflect skepticism toward imposed structures of meaning. His famous declaration that "nothing matters" encapsulates a worldview that refuses to seek certainty or coherence in a universe devoid of inherent purpose (Camus 121). Similarly, in *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon's endless waiting can be interpreted as an existential metaphor for humanity's search for certainty and meaning. Yet, unlike

Descartes, who resolves his doubt through the affirmation of the self, Beckett's characters remain trapped in a state of perpetual uncertainty, unable to find resolution or purpose.

Scholarship on Beckett and Camus has extensively explored their existentialist and absurdist themes. Martin Esslin's seminal work *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1961) positions Beckett's plays as emblematic of a literary movement that rejects traditional narrative structures and embraces the absurdity of human existence. Esslin observes that Beckett's characters "exist in a vacuum, their lives devoid of any recognizable purpose" (Esslin 23). Similarly, Camus' works have been analyzed as philosophical explorations of the absurd, with scholars like Robert Zaretsky noting that "Camus invites us to confront life's lack of meaning with courage and defiance" (Zaretsky 87). These analyses highlight the existentialist and absurdist dimensions of Beckett and Camus' works but rarely connect them to Cartesian doubt.

Critchley's *Very Little ... Almost Nothing* (1997) provides a bridge between Cartesian doubt and absurdism, arguing that absurdist literature often mirrors Descartes' method of skepticism by deconstructing the reliability of reason and perception. Critchley writes, "Absurdist literature takes Cartesian doubt to its logical extreme, refusing to offer any resolution to the uncertainty it generates" (Critchley 112). This perspective opens new avenues for understanding the philosophical underpinnings of *Waiting for Godot* and *The Stranger*. By examining these works through the lens of Cartesian doubt, this study seeks to illuminate the ways in which Beckett and Camus engage with the tension between reason and the irrational, certainty and absurdity.

The intersection of Cartesian doubt and absurdism offers a compelling framework for analyzing *Waiting for Godot* and *The Stranger*. While Descartes seeks certainty in the face of doubt, Beckett and Camus embrace doubt as an inherent aspect of existence. Their works challenge readers to confront the uncertainties of life without recourse to illusions or

false consolations. As Camus writes, “There is no sun without shadow, and it is essential to know the night” (Camus 123). This study aims to explore how Beckett and Camus’ characters navigate the complexities of doubt and absurdity, offering new insights into the philosophical dimensions of their works. René Descartes’ philosophy of radical doubt is foundational to modern thought, as it challenges preconceived notions of reality and knowledge. His assertion, *Cogito, ergo sum* (“I think, therefore I am”), establishes the self’s existence as the only certainty in a world of potential deception (Descartes 17). While Descartes seeks to resolve doubt through reason, existentialist thinkers like Camus and Sartre reject such resolutions, emphasizing the absurdity of existence. Scholars such as Stephen Gaukroger argue that Descartes’ method of doubt “undermines traditional certainties, paving the way for existentialist inquiries into meaning and existence” (Gaukroger 145).

Albert Camus’ philosophy of the absurd, as articulated in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), confronts the tension between humanity’s search for meaning and the indifference of the universe. Camus famously asserts, “There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide” (Camus 3). This provocative statement underscores the existential crisis at the heart of the absurd: the recognition of life’s lack of inherent purpose. In *The Stranger*, Meursault’s detachment from societal norms and his ultimate acceptance of the absurd reflect Camus’ philosophy. Meursault’s declaration that “nothing matters” encapsulates his rejection of traditional moral and religious frameworks (Camus 121). Scholars such as Robert Zaretsky emphasize that Camus’ works “challenge readers to confront life’s absurdity without resorting to false consolations” (Zaretsky 87).

Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* similarly explores the absurdity of human existence through its minimalist narrative and repetitive structure. The play’s central characters, Vladimir and Estragon, wait endlessly for Godot, whose arrival remains uncertain.

This act of waiting, devoid of resolution or purpose, exemplifies the existential struggle to find meaning in an indifferent world. Martin Esslin's *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1961) positions Beckett's works as emblematic of a movement that "rejects traditional narrative structures and embraces the absurdity of human existence" (Esslin 23). Esslin argues that Beckett's characters exist in a "state of perpetual uncertainty, reflecting the epistemological and existential crises of modernity" (Esslin 35).

The philosophical intersection between Cartesian doubt and absurdism has been explored by scholars such as Simon Critchley, who argues that absurdist literature "takes Cartesian doubt to its logical extreme, refusing to offer any resolution to the uncertainty it generates" (Critchley 112). Critchley's analysis highlights the parallels between Descartes' radical skepticism and the existentialist condition, suggesting that both approaches confront the limitations of human understanding. In *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon's repeated questioning of their actions and surroundings mirrors Descartes' method of doubt, yet their inability to find certainty reflects the absurdist rejection of resolution. Similarly, in *The Stranger*, Meursault's indifference to societal norms and his confrontation with death embody a skepticism that aligns with the existentialist embrace of doubt and uncertainty.

Scholars have also noted the influence of religious and metaphysical frameworks on Beckett and Camus' works. Ruby Cohn, in her analysis of Beckett's plays, observes that *Waiting for Godot* "subverts traditional religious narratives by presenting Godot as an absent or indifferent deity" (Cohn 78). This absence parallels Camus' rejection of religious consolation, as articulated in *The Myth of Sisyphus*: "The absurd is not in man nor in the world, but in their presence together" (Camus 21). Both Beckett and Camus challenge readers to confront the absence of divine meaning, highlighting the existential and absurdist tensions in their works.

Furthermore, Andrew Gibson's *Samuel Beckett: A Critical Life* (2010) emphasizes the philosophical depth of Beckett's works, noting that "Beckett's plays encapsulate the existentialist struggle to find meaning in a world where certainty is unattainable" (Gibson 159). Similarly, Harold Bloom's analysis of *The Stranger* situates Camus within the existentialist tradition, arguing that "Meursault's journey reflects a profound engagement with the philosophical questions of meaning, morality, and the human condition" (Bloom 64). In conclusion, the philosophical and literary dimensions of *Waiting for Godot* and *The Stranger* reflect a complex interplay between Cartesian doubt, existentialism, and absurdism. While Descartes seeks certainty in the face of doubt, Beckett and Camus embrace doubt as an inherent aspect of existence. Their works challenge readers to confront life's uncertainties without recourse to illusions or false consolations. As Camus writes, "The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart" (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 123). This study aims to further explore how Beckett and Camus' characters navigate the complexities of doubt and absurdity, offering new insights into the philosophical underpinnings of their works.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is built on the intersection of René Descartes' philosophy, particularly his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, and the existential and absurdist themes present in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Albert Camus' *The Stranger*. The study will primarily draw on Descartes' method of radical skepticism, his foundational concept of *Cogito, ergo sum* ("I think, therefore I am"), and his philosophical exploration of doubt, certainty, and existence. Descartes' radical doubt—where he questions everything except for the certainty of his own thinking existence—serves as a philosophical

backdrop to the existential questioning and search for meaning found in the works of Beckett and Camus.

In *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes argues that the only indubitable truth is the existence of the self as a thinking being. This radical skepticism, which rejects the certainty of the external world and even the body, ultimately affirms the self's existence through thought. This concept of doubt and the search for certainty is crucial for understanding the characters in *Waiting for Godot* and *The Stranger*, who, much like Descartes, question the meaning of their existence in a seemingly indifferent world.

The study will also engage with existentialist and absurdist thought, particularly as articulated by Camus and Beckett. Camus' notion of the *absurd*—the conflict between humans' desire for meaning and the universe's indifference to that search—will be central to understanding Meursault's indifference in *The Stranger* and the repetitive, futile waiting of Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*. Camus' concept of the absurd hero, who continues to search for meaning despite the inherent meaninglessness of existence, will be compared to Descartes' search for certainty in a world of doubt. Additionally, the study will draw on existentialist thinkers like Jean-Paul Sartre, who emphasize individual freedom, choice, and the creation of meaning in an otherwise meaningless universe. Sartre's idea of "bad faith," where individuals deceive themselves to avoid confronting the absurdity of existence, will provide a point of contrast to Descartes' search for clear, rational certainty.

This theoretical framework will guide the analysis of how Descartes' skepticism about the external world and the search for certainty in the self relates to the characters' existential struggles in Beckett's and Camus' works. By examining the connections between Cartesian doubt, existentialism, and absurdism, the research will explore how these

philosophical traditions inform one another and deepen our understanding of the human condition in the face of uncertainty and the search for meaning.

2.1 Operational Definitions

Radical skepticism, as defined by René Descartes, refers to the philosophical method of doubting the certainty of everything except for the existence of the self as a thinking being. Descartes' skepticism challenges the reliability of external knowledge, asserting that only the mind's existence is indubitable. This concept is central to the study, as it will be used to analyze the characters' constant questioning of their existence and surroundings in both *Waiting for Godot* and *The Stranger*. Descartes' *Meditations* (1641) presents the idea that in order to arrive at certain knowledge, one must first doubt everything, which leads to the affirmation of one's own existence: *Cogito, ergo sum* ("I think, therefore I am") (Descartes, 1641). This will be operationalized as the characters' inability to trust external sources of meaning, reflecting their existential doubt and search for purpose.

Descartes' famous assertion *Cogito, ergo sum* is foundational to modern philosophy. It signifies the certainty of one's existence as a thinking being, even when all other knowledge is doubted. In this study, this concept will be used to explore the characters' realization of their own existence despite the absurdity of their circumstances. For instance, Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot* continuously question their purpose and the existence of Godot, yet their own awareness of their being expressed through their dialogues and actions aligns with Descartes' notion of self-awareness through thought. Similarly, Meursault in *The Stranger* demonstrates a detached awareness of his own existence, particularly in his reflections on death and the meaninglessness of life (Camus, 1942). In both

cases, the characters' recognition of their own presence, even in a world devoid of clear meaning, echoes Descartes' assertion that the self exists as long as it thinks.

Existentialism is a philosophical movement that emphasizes individual freedom, choice, and the creation of meaning in an otherwise meaningless universe. In the context of this study, existentialism will be used to analyze how characters in *Waiting for Godot* and *The Stranger* grapple with the lack of inherent meaning in their lives and the freedom to create their own purpose. Jean-Paul Sartre, a key existentialist thinker, argues that existence precedes essence, meaning that individuals are free to define themselves through their actions (Sartre, 1943). In *The Stranger*, Meursault's indifferent attitude toward life and his rejection of societal norms reflect the existential belief in the absurdity of existence and the individual's responsibility to create meaning in a world that offers none (Camus, 1942). Likewise, Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot* experience an existential crisis, perpetually waiting for Godot in the absence of any clear reason for their actions, embodying Sartre's concept of freedom in the face of an absurd world.

Absurdism, as defined by Albert Camus, arises from the conflict between humans' search for meaning and the universe's indifference to that search. In his essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), Camus asserts that life's inherent meaninglessness leads to the absurd condition, where humans must confront the futility of their efforts to find purpose. This concept will be operationalized in the study as the recognition of life's futility in both Beckett's and Camus' works. For instance, Vladimir and Estragon's endless waiting in *Waiting for Godot* symbolizes the absurdity of their existence, as they await a figure (Godot) who may never arrive, representing an unfulfilled search for meaning. Similarly, in *The Stranger*, Meursault's passive acceptance of the absurdity of life and his indifferent response

to death and societal expectations exemplify the core of Camus' absurdist philosophy (Camus, 1942).

Meaninglessness refers to the absence of inherent purpose or significance in life. This concept will be operationalized in the study as the characters' confrontation with a world that offers no clear or inherent meaning. In *Waiting for Godot*, the lack of an arrival of Godot symbolizes the characters' struggle with the absence of meaning in their existence. In *The Stranger*, Meursault's indifference to life events, including the death of his mother and his own trial, underscores the existential theme of meaninglessness, as he rejects the societal imposition of meaning and embraces the absurd (Camus, 1942).

Chapter 3: Cartesian Analysis of *Waiting for Godot*

René Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) introduces the concept of radical skepticism, where he doubts everything except the certainty of his own existence. Descartes famously states, "*I think, therefore I am*" (*Cogito, ergo sum*), suggesting that the only thing one can be sure of is the existence of the self as a thinking being. This radical skepticism is evident in *Waiting for Godot*, where Vladimir and Estragon question not only the existence of Godot but also the nature of their own existence and the reality around them. For instance, in Act 1, Vladimir asks, "*What are we doing here, that is the question?*" (Beckett, 1952). This reflects the Cartesian doubt of the external world and the questioning of their own purpose. The characters' uncertainty about Godot's arrival mirrors Descartes' skepticism regarding the certainty of the external world, as they cannot rely on external assurances to validate their actions or beliefs. The play's cyclical nature, where the characters wait, speak, and repeat the same actions without any clear resolution, echoes Descartes' concept of doubt, where everything is questioned until only the self remains as certain. Descartes' *Cogito, ergo sum* asserts that the act of thinking proves one's existence. For Descartes, even in the face of uncertainty about the external world, the mind's ability to doubt and question is proof of its existence. This idea is reflected in *Waiting for Godot*, where the characters' ongoing reflections and dialogues about their existence serve as a confirmation of their being. Despite their endless waiting, Vladimir and Estragon are consistently aware of their own consciousness.

In Act 2, Vladimir reflects, "*We are all born mad. Some remain so*" (Beckett, 1952), illustrating his awareness of his existence, even though he questions the meaning of it. This line can be interpreted through Descartes' philosophy, where the very act of questioning their existence—whether Godot will come or not—affirms their being. The characters' constant

awareness of their own doubts and thoughts aligns with Descartes' notion that one's existence is certain as long as they think.

For Descartes, the mind's search for certainty is a fundamental aspect of human existence. However, in *Waiting for Godot*, the characters' search for meaning is ultimately futile. They are trapped in a repetitive cycle of waiting for Godot, a figure whose identity and purpose remain ambiguous and uncertain. This endless waiting represents the absurdity that Camus later explores in his concept of the *absurd hero*, who continues the search for meaning despite knowing that it is inherently pointless.

Vladimir and Estragon's search for Godot is never fulfilled, symbolizing the absurdity of their quest for meaning in a world that offers no answers. At one point, Estragon says, "*Nothing to be done*" (Beckett, 1952), which reflects the characters' recognition of the futility of their waiting. This aligns with Descartes' skepticism about the external world—since Godot never arrives, the characters' entire existence seems to be based on an uncertain and unreliable external reality. Like Descartes, who doubts everything except for his own mind, the characters' focus on their own thoughts and conversations becomes the only stable aspect of their existence, even though it offers no ultimate resolution.

The absence of Godot in the play can be interpreted through Descartes' radical skepticism. Just as Descartes doubts the certainty of the external world, Vladimir and Estragon are forced to confront the possibility that Godot may never come, and their waiting may be meaningless. In Act 2, Vladimir says, "*We are waiting for Godot*" (Beckett, 1952), repeating the central premise of the play, yet the absence of Godot reflects the uncertainty and skepticism that permeate the characters' lives. Descartes' method of doubt leads to the

realization that, one cannot trust external sources of knowledge, and this mirrors the characters' growing doubt about the arrival of Godot.

The play's structure, with its repetitive dialogue and actions, underscores the lack of certainty in the characters' world. Their inability to know when or if Godot will arrive parallels Descartes' assertion that one can never be certain of anything beyond the self. The characters' constant questioning and waiting represent the human condition of seeking meaning in a world that offers no guarantees or answers, reflecting the Cartesian doubt that no external truth can be fully trusted.

A Cartesian analysis of *Waiting for Godot* reveals how Descartes' philosophy of radical skepticism and the certainty of the self through thought are reflected in the characters' experiences of doubt, self-awareness, and the search for meaning. Like Descartes, who questions everything except the existence of the self, Vladimir and Estragon's existential crisis is marked by their uncertainty about the external world and their reliance on their own consciousness. The play's absurdity and cyclical nature emphasize the futility of seeking external meaning, mirroring Descartes' assertion that the only certain truth is the self's existence as a thinking being. In this way, *Waiting for Godot* not only embodies existential themes but also offers a poignant reflection on Descartes' philosophical exploration of doubt and existence.

Chapter 4: Cartesian Analysis of *The Stranger*

Albert Camus' *The Stranger* is a seminal work of existentialism and absurdism, where the protagonist, Meursault, navigates life with an indifferent, detached attitude toward the world around him. The novel's exploration of the absurd and the meaninglessness of life aligns with René Descartes' philosophy of radical skepticism, particularly his method of doubt and the certainty of the self as a thinking being. A Cartesian analysis of *The Stranger* illuminates how Meursault's experience of doubt, self-awareness, and the search for meaning parallels Descartes' philosophical inquiry into existence and the external world.

In *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), Descartes introduces radical skepticism, a method of doubting the certainty of everything except for the existence of the self as a thinking being. He argues that one can doubt the existence of the external world, the bodies around us, and even the reality of other minds, but the act of doubting itself confirms the certainty of the doubter's existence. Descartes famously asserts, "*I think, therefore I am*" (*Cogito, ergo sum*), meaning that even if one doubts everything, the fact that one is thinking affirms the existence of the self (Descartes, 1641).

In *The Stranger*, Meursault embodies this Cartesian skepticism through his indifferent and detached approach to life. His reaction to his mother's death in the opening scene of the novel is a prime example of his skepticism toward external events. He states, "*Maman died today. Or yesterday maybe, I don't know*" (Camus, 1942). This indifference reflects Descartes' radical skepticism, where Meursault doubts the significance of external events, treating them with emotional detachment. His lack of attachment to external reality, including his relationships and his actions, mirrors Descartes' assertion that the external world can be doubted, and only the self remains certain. Meursault's inability to feel remorse or question

the external world's meaning shows his indifference to the idea that reality can be anything more than a fleeting experience.

Descartes' famous phrase *Cogito, ergo sum* emphasizes that the only certain truth is the existence of the self as a thinking being. For Descartes, even if one doubts the existence of everything else, the act of doubting confirms that the self exists. Meursault's self-awareness in *The Stranger* aligns with this Cartesian certainty, though it is expressed in a manner that is far removed from traditional philosophical reflections on existence. Meursault's thoughts are his only source of certainty, and this self-awareness becomes more pronounced as he confronts his own mortality.

In the novel, Meursault's growing awareness of his own existence is particularly evident during his trial and eventual confrontation with death. In the courtroom, Meursault reflects on his life and the absurdity of human existence: "*I opened myself to the gentle indifference of the world. Finding it so much like myself—so like a brother, really—that I felt that I had been happy and that I was happy again*" (Camus, 1942). This moment in the novel illustrates Meursault's recognition of his own self-consciousness, aligning with Descartes' idea that the only certainty is the self. Meursault does not find comfort in this realization, but rather an acknowledgment of the absurdity of existence, echoing Descartes' notion that the self is the only indubitable truth.

In *The Stranger*, Meursault's journey is one of confronting the absurdity of life. The novel reflects Camus' existential philosophy, where life has no inherent meaning, and it is up to individuals to create their own meaning in an indifferent world. Meursault's indifference to societal norms, his apathetic response to his mother's death, and his emotional detachment

from his actions demonstrate a rejection of the idea that life has any intrinsic purpose. This aligns with Descartes' skepticism about the certainty of external knowledge and his focus on the self as the only certain existence.

Meursault's recognition of the absurdity of existence is evident when he faces the prospect of his own death. He realizes that life is meaningless, yet he does not despair. Instead, he accepts the absurdity of existence, much like Descartes' acceptance of the limits of human knowledge. In the final moments of the novel, Meursault states, "*I had lived my life one way and I could have lived it another*" (Camus, 1942), acknowledging the arbitrary nature of existence. This acceptance of the absurd mirrors Descartes' idea that, while one can doubt everything, the self remains the only certainty, and through this awareness, one must find a way to live.

Albert Camus' concept of the *absurd hero* in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) refers to a person who, despite recognizing the meaninglessness of life, continues to live with defiance and acceptance of the absurd. Meursault, in many ways, embodies the absurd hero. Despite his recognition of the absurdity of life, he does not seek meaning or transcendence but instead lives in the moment, accepting life as it is. This mirrors Descartes' emphasis on the self as the only certain reality, and the individual's responsibility to navigate the world with awareness of its limitations.

In the novel's final scene, as Meursault faces his execution, he finds clarity in his acceptance of life's absurdity. He reflects on the indifference of the universe, stating, "*I had lived my life one way and I could have lived it another*" (Camus, 1942). This realization is similar to Descartes' idea of accepting the self as the only certain existence. Meursault, like

Descartes' skeptical subject, finds his truth not in the external world but in his own awareness of existence, embracing the absurd without seeking meaning or justification.

A Cartesian analysis of *The Stranger* highlights the ways in which Descartes' philosophy of radical skepticism, the certainty of the self, and the search for meaning resonate within Camus' exploration of the absurd. Meursault's indifference to the external world and his eventual confrontation with the absurdity of existence reflect Descartes' skepticism about external reality. His self-awareness, particularly in the face of death, aligns with Descartes' assertion that the only certainty is the self. Ultimately, *The Stranger* portrays a character who, like Descartes' doubting subject, navigates a world filled with uncertainty, but finds certainty in his own existence as a thinking being.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This research has explored the intersection of Cartesian philosophy and existential absurdity as reflected in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Albert Camus' *The Stranger*. By employing René Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy* as a theoretical framework, the study highlights how both works grapple with the search for meaning in a seemingly indifferent and uncertain world. Descartes' radical skepticism, encapsulated in his famous assertion "*Cogito, ergo sum*" (*I think, therefore I am*), provides a lens through which the existential crises of the characters can be understood.

In *Waiting for Godot*, Vladimir and Estragon's endless waiting and questioning mirror Descartes' method of doubt, as they confront the futility of their actions and the uncertainty of external reality. Similarly, Meursault in *The Stranger* embodies Cartesian self-awareness through his detachment from societal norms and eventual acceptance of life's absurdity. Both texts underscore the tension between the human desire for certainty and the recognition of life's inherent ambiguity and absurdity.

Ultimately, this research demonstrates that Descartes' philosophical inquiry into doubt and existence enriches our understanding of the existential themes in Beckett's and Camus' works. While Descartes sought certainty in the self's existence, the characters in these texts grapple with the absurdity of existence itself, finding meaning—or the lack thereof—within the confines of their own consciousness. This intersection between Cartesian philosophy and existential absurdity not only deepens the analysis of these literary texts but also underscores the enduring relevance of philosophical inquiry in understanding the human condition.

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