

Examining the Role of Existentialism in Climate Change Mitigation

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ABSTRACT

Man has relied on nature for food, medicine, fresh air, water, and other life-supporting factors. However, human activities have threatened biodiversity which now poses a magnanimous threat to man's food, water, air, and medicine supply. Existentialist philosophy emphasizes the aspects of freedom, choice, and responsibility. We are where we are because of man's choice and we can change our situation through choice. In this paper, we refer to among various existential themes, the concept of freedom, authenticity, transcendence, choice, and responsibility. We acknowledge that man's actions have led to threats to his existence. On the contrary, man has lived in bad faith by relying on the deity to save him (man) from self-inflicted anguish. It can be observed that unless man authentically takes responsibility, his very existence is threatened and may lead to his extinction. For centuries, man's existence has been dependent on nature for survival, however, man's actions have destroyed nature upon which man's existence was dependent. The purely scientific course of action which depends on the political will of the governments has not produced any tangible fruits, since politicians tend to act based on political expediency. Governments are formed by politicians who are often keen on winning the next election. As such, most governments tend to place climate change on the periphery as they get preoccupied with what can help them win the next election. This therefore implies that there is very high confidence that policies managed by governments are very likely to fail. This is why this paper seeks to reinvent the narrative and develop a framework based on existentialist philosophical aspects of individual, authenticity, freedom, and choice, and demonstrate how this framework anchored on existentialist philosophy goes beyond mere mitigation and adaptation.

INTRODUCTION

This article examines some of the key initiatives undertaken by both global and national authorities to mitigate climate change. It demonstrates the shortcomings of the said initiatives and explores the role of existentialist philosophy in understanding the phenomenon of climate change and how the existentialist perspective would challenge the existing frameworks in addressing climate change.

Existentialism

This is an all-inclusive term that refers to the school of thought that subscribes to the thought that the essential of humans is a fundamental philosophical problem whose address could be done best through ontology. Although most existentialist philosophers did not use the term existentialism, the ideologies of the movement, have not only influenced philosophical doctrines as well as other disciplines like psychology and other arts. This is one of the distinguishing characteristics that set existentialism different from other intellectual movements in history. Existentialism permeates many human disciplines and stretches far beyond academic and literary works in history. Existentialist emphasis on the concepts of freedom and self-determination or creation has informed various revolutionary ideologies in politics as well as faith. The engagement of existentialism with the mysterious relationship between freedom and faith as well as the incomprehensible notion of God and his role in human identity coupled with its analyses of concepts of self-realization and the anxiety of life has significantly influenced humanistic development and also influenced a lot of theories in psychology (Aho, 2020).

This philosophical thought system can be traced from the period after World War II, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the Holocaust massacre (Baert, 2015). It is important to note that these events brought to consciousness of man the anxiety, the absurdity and the meaninglessness of life. As such the thought arose as an attempt of man to confront this reality of human condition without forgetting the givenness of death.

It is due to the wide range of existentialism incarnations that this study finds it worthy of consideration in the effort to address climate change. Considering some of the realities that prompted the emergence of existentialist thought, we feel that climate change poses the same puzzle facing man which requires existentialist thinking. As has been discussed in the preceding chapter, climate change poses an existential threat to man and the meaning of his life. In this regard, this study finds it immensely valuable to consider existentialism as a framework for relooking at some of the initiatives developed to address climate change. Given that different existentialist philosophers hold or propagate variant ideas, certain concepts tend to occasionally overlap among the philosophers that are referred to as existentialist philosophers. These concepts which include; nihilism, existence precedes essence, freedom, authenticity, choice, and ethics will be examined against the phenomenon of climate change with the view of demonstrating the role they play in developing a framework for addressing climate change.

The notion of nihilism arose as an existentialist thought emergence as a concept describing the state of affairs after secular scientific tradition replaced the traditional pre-modern religious stranglehold thus leading to the annihilation of any transcendental moral structure. This led to the emergence of life states of anxiety, meaninglessness, boredom, and alienation. The current worldview which is heavily oriented towards technology and artificial intelligence tends to continuously annihilate the frameworks that formed foundations of moral values that controlled human behavior. As such, man has continuously exhausted the resources of nature leading to climate change, which is an existential threat. This threat ultimately throws man into a state of anxiety and absurdity.

Existentialism also champions the notion that existence precedes essence. In this notion, existentialists argue that we have no advance given essence, rather our identity is created through our continuous choices as our lives unfold. Man is part of nature, although he possesses uniqueness in relation to other being in the universe. In the process of creating his identity, man relies on the universe to which he belongs. However, man's actions have caused harm to the universe to which he belongs causing the threat of climate change through global warming. This action, in the view of this paper then impacts negatively on man in the process of creating his identity since the destruction of nature will eventually limit his choices. Existentialist concept of freedom distinguishes us from other being in the world. This is because its only human who has the capacity to be conscious of themselves and responsible for whatever we do and who we become. We are able to interpret and assign meaning to any limits to our determination. Existentialism critiques the human tendency to conform to conventions and the public or the world's expectations. This conformity undermines another existentialist concept of authenticity. In this regard, an authentic life is one that is lived with commitment to projects that gives meaning to our lives as individuals. In a world in which hope for a better future is undermined by catastrophic climate change, man finds himself faced with the imperative to undertake a project (s) that will bring meaning to this world shattered by climate change and unpredictable weather that undermines man's freedom and choices.

The influence of Plato whose conception of truth was metaphysical and one that is only attainable through reason influenced the thinking of many philosophers before the modern period, especially the medieval movement. This kind of perspective viewed everything as having a predetermined essence with a deity responsible for the workings and the ultimate end of the universe. This orientation has given man a kind of false thinking that all things that happen are known and designed by God. This therefore has made man to detach from his responsibility to care for the universe in which he lives. The existentialist philosophical thought system attempts to reawaken the consciousness of man and restore the responsibility for the well-being of the universe to man. Various existentialist philosophers hold views that are significant in emphasizing the role of humans in restoring the balance of nature. It is thus worthwhile to examine the various existentialist philosophers' ideas and how they challenge the climate narrative. The objective here is to reinvent the climate change mitigation narrative in the light of existentialist philosophy by drawing inspirations from the existentialist philosophers and demonstrating the import of adopting an existentialist world view of the climate change mitigation.

Martin Heidegger and the role of Dasein

The Platonic perspective of detachment attitude is critiqued by existentialist philosophers. The detachment methodology promoted rational objectivity as a way of attaining truth. This detached attitude is the one to which we have referred above. It tends to influence man's thinking to view the world from a rational distance, what philosophers call the "God's eye view". With this attitude, we are tempted to view the world with an attitude that it is God who is responsible for "his" universe. Against this third-party outlook, existentialism advances a perspective anchored on the activity of existence that is felt and interpreted from the first person's experiential viewpoint. Existentialism propounds that we analyze our existence from the first-person experience. This is phenomenological. The experience of everyday life in the world is of the essence in the analysis of our being and our essence. This philosophy's departure is the individual who is engaged in daily life confronting that givens of the existence. Ultimately, the understanding and meaning-making of life is once again subjective and placed on the shoulder of the individual subject. This line of thought brings to clarity the central argument of this study there is an attitude of the third party outlook with regards to climate change and its mitigation.

Heidegger in his *Being and time* furthers the critique against detachment attitude. Heidegger being influenced by the phenomenology of Husserl return to the things as they are in themselves. He intends not to explain what man is rather he is concerned with how man is. His phenomenology is anchored on the attempt to describe human not as an objective substance in nature that has to be explained but as a being to which he refers as *Dasein*; a kind of existence that depicts an activity of giving self a meaning and self-interpretation. Therefore, by *Dasein* he means a way of a subject's being (Heidegger, 1927). This *Dasein* is involved with the world around him and is engaged with institutions and equipment that entails the process or the way to understand the world.

Heidegger conceives being-in-the-world in a unique way anchored on three ideas that will influence the understanding of existentialism and phenomenology in the modern world. First, his conception is significantly different from Cartesian conception which view the self as 'I' who is a constitution of the inner mental thoughts and beliefs and one that is detached from the outer world. Heidegger denies dualism of existence and argues that the self is not a distinguished embodiment rather the self is an existence activity which is not separate from the world, rather bound with the world structurally as a relational activity. Essentially, Heidegger argues that the self and the world are together as a single entity, *dasein* is therefore a way of existence in the world (Heidegger, 1927) Secondly, in his conception, Heidegger views the world not as a space to be occupied nor the entirety of objects, rather the world, argues Heidegger, is the relational setting we have in the world and the context of meaning in which we share and are involved. We are involved in the world and this involvement makes different objects affect and matter to us in certain ways. Thirdly, Heidegger asserts that being in the world is an activity that gives life meaning. Heidegger makes a strong point in this study by arguing that our engagement with the objects in the world, we give them meaning. Our encounter with the objects in the world reveal to us their meaningfulness. We encounter them as meaningful entities. The public meanings we grow into is shaped by the experience we attain from what appears to us (Heidegger, 1919).

Heidegger argues that our existence entails an intentional structure. Our existence is always about something or of something, this implies that our existence is directed towards objects since it is always meaning laden. The meaning we attain is not generated by external or some cognitive associations that are detached from the world, rather the meaning emerges from our engagement with the world functionally in a kind of shared network of equipment, projects, roles and institutions reflecting some sort of practical skill that is not theoretically explicit (Heidegger, 1950). Clearly, Heidegger's exposition of the *Dasein* as being part of the world and not an object distinct from the rest of the world provides a platform against which humans can establish a theoretical framework for dealing with the world and the danger of climate change that the world faces currently. The realization by every *Dasein* that he is part of the world, and it is his relationship with the world and the objects in it gives meaning to his life prompts the *Dasein* to care for the world since, the care for the world thus becomes an imperative to continue his meaning-giving activity of existence. He does not live detached from the world, rather he is essentially part of it. Consequently, the destruction of the world through anthropogenic climate change thus threatens to annihilate the *Dasein* as part of the world.

The world as alluded to by Heidegger is not a geometric space distinct from us, rather our relational setting of

our lives. It is thus not possible to separate our existence and to possibly imagine the possibility of our existence even after the destruction of biodiversity. The fact that my body is not an extended discrete object that is separated in space and cognizable by a mind emphasizes the point of our oneness with the world. Our bodies exist and are nourished by the world. Hence, destruction of the world destroys my body too. And since my body the site of my affectivity of meaning, I cannot find meaning without it and it is part of the world as Merleau-Ponty (1945) puts it, it is caught up in the world. It is thus not an object to be known rather it is an entity that is lived. This fact presupposes that our moods and experiences are bound in the worldly meanings and our way of internalizing the meanings influence or shape our daily experiences and direct our interpretation of our identities.

Climate change and existential anxiety

It therefore goes without saying that the possibility of the destruction of the world through anthropogenic climate change poses an existential threat to the *Dasein*. This impending threat then creates a state of anxiety. Heidegger interprets this anxiety as an individualizing mood. It pulls us momentarily from the routine of what he calls the “they”, that is, the masses. This anxiety leaves us vulnerable and verily exposed to confront our own reality or lives. This situation liberates us from the possibility of self-deception and gives us an insight or a moment of vision which prompts us to the mood of focus and urgency. Climate change presents to man a troubling state of affair. It is our reading that the puzzling state of existential threat posed by climate change stimulates a kind of anxiety that subjects us to vulnerability. This state then should prompt a mood of urgency and elicit focus to mitigate climate change occasioned by global warming. The unpredictable and severe weather patterns consisting of sudden storms, strong winds, flash floods, cyclones, unprecedented droughts and heat waves expose man to constantly impending danger to his existence, thus creating a new cause of anxiety to *Dasein*. Noteworthy, the individuation alluded to by Heidegger does not detach man from the world, neither does it detach me from the history.

Heidegger argues that our choices are influenced by what he calls “historicity”. Thus, our choices are guided by historical factors and so they don’t simply come from nowhere. As such, they have been influenced by a historical community (Heidegger, 1927). However, individuation allows me or prompts a vision for me to rise from my fallen state and return to my history with a new look. It is a scientific fact that the effects of climate change we encounter currently are as a result of man’s activity and especially the past activities, say, the industrial period moving forward. As such, looking at it from Heideggerian lenses, our choices today are prompted by historical factors or activities and it is imperative of us to embrace individuation and make choices that will give our lives meanings amidst the world bedeviled by climate change catastrophe.

Existentialism propounds the concept of being for others. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger develops idea of liberating concern which is anchored on the quest for the care of others. This care is aimed at liberating others from the self-deception to enable them face and create their own identities and existence. This care entails helping others to be transparent to themselves and attain freedom. Heidegger insists that this help does not mean taking away responsibility from others of their lives, rather it is the giving back the other the freedom and anxiety to confront their lives through authentic relation. We do not intend to take away the care from of the others, rather it is based on the ethical maxim which prompts us to act in a way to attain our own freedom as well as the attainment of freedom of the others (Heidegger, 1962).

The existentialist maxim here presents an ethical as well as existential theoretical framework upon which to justify our responsibility to the future generations and take steps to mitigate climate change. This is not to mean that we take away the future generation’s responsibility and care for their own life and freedom, rather to avoid any factors that may compromise their capacity to realize their freedom and create meaning for their lives. Heideggerian existentialism thus provides a platform or a theoretical justification for our action that seek to mitigate climate with the concern for the future generation in our minds.

Soren Kierkegaard presents a unique analysis and exposition of the concept of anxiety. For Kierkegaard, anxiety is a situation that arises upon the attainment of self-consciousness and the dizzying effect that comes with the realization of one’s freedom and the boundlessness of one’s existence (Kierkegaard, 1844). Kierkegaard’s anxiety stems from what Sartre would refer to as condemnation to freedom and the burden of choice. The

imagery of Adam's situation after eating the fruit at the garden of Eden and subsequent knowledge of the good and bad which placed on him the burden of choice and self-determination, no more innocent existence under the protection and providence of God. Kierkegaard likens anxiety to the feeling one has when they stand facing a cliff, a situation that presents man with options that are both threatening. The picture painted by Kierkegaard depicts anxiety as a state wonder on which course of action to take amidst uncertainty of the world or life. Kierkegaard states that anxiety brings us to state of self-consciousness, informing us of our choices, responsibility and self-awareness. This means that man becomes fully aware of their potential through the state of anxiety.

Of essence if the fact that anxiety arises as a consequence of knowledge. One becomes aware of the reality and choices with which he is faced. This phenomenon breeds creativity (May, 1996). The feeling of anxiety thus prompts one to create himself, to actualize his possibilities. This entails breaking the status quo and destroying the old patterns and establishing new forms of living. Climate change phenomenon stimulates this state of anxiety. The knowledge of the potential danger due to climate change presents man with this feeling of anxiety. However, it is safe to say that this situation presents man with a unique challenge and stimulates him to be creative to change his situation and overcome the dread of potential demise of his existence and civilization.

Eco-Anxiety

Anxiety in the existentialist perspective is a situation that presents both threats and possibilities. This study having examined the relationship between climate change and the concept of anxiety, realizes that climate change also impacts on the emotions of people. The concept ecological anxiety is a relatively emerging phenomenon in the light of ever-increasing climate or ecological crisis. Numerous efforts are being made by scholars to understand the meaning and the severity of climate related anxiety. According to Clayton and Karazsia, (2020) eco-anxiety is a pile of negative emotions associated with ecological crisis such as worry, sadness and guilt.

Bohm (2003) defines eco-anxiety as a set of emotions that are triggered by the expectation of future implications of the crisis of ecology. Landmann (2020) offers a related definition stating that eco-anxiety entails the emotions that arise from the response to the expected future negative consequences of environmental crisis. According to Pikhala, (2022) eco-anxiety breeds the feeling of uncertainty, uncontrollability and unpredictability that arise in relation to the future. This uncertainty causes one to be distressed, and feelings of being overwhelmed and helpless (Ojala et al, 2021). Eco-anxiety thus is the uncertain and indeterminate future threat. The picture painted here is that eco-anxiety is a threat to man's psychological well-being. However, it is important to point out that these definitions of eco-anxiety notwithstanding, the inspiration is drawn from the original thinkers like Kierkegaard. Scholars argue that eco-anxiety takes two forms, first, anxiety arises from the enormity of the future threat as a result of ecological crisis and secondly, anxiety arises from the uncertainty of the individual choice of action for environmental preservation and other people's response towards such actions. According to Hamilton, (2020), there is a phenomenon that seems to diminish the potential climate actions or advocacy. This study found that there are environmental enthusiasts who are afraid of being seen by their friends and co-workers as being too moralistic. Another study by Hoggett and Randal, (2018) found that other environmental scientist had to contend with contempt and sarcasm from their co-workers on whether advocacy for climate action will bring food to those who deny the reality of climate change.

Marczak et al, (2021) found that eco-anxiety also arose from the difficult and new choices that man is faced with due to the present ecological crisis and climate change. This anxiety manifests in the people's fear to make certain decisions about their lives due to the fear of the possible threats from climate change. In their research, Marczak et al, (2021) found that some people are even scared of having children due to their fear for safety in the face of ecological crisis. However, another study by Pihkala, (2021) found that this anxiety enhanced climate awareness and stimulated climate action among other people. It is of essence to note that eco-anxiety is a kind of practical anxiety. The practicality in eco-anxiety comes from the fact that, this kind of anxiety serves two purposes. First, it serves as an alarm to awaken humanity and prompts awareness of the current situation that is characterized by uncertainty and secondly, it prompts the attitude of research which aims at finding a solution. Consequently, the rational and best existential response to the state of anxiety, and in this case, eco-anxiety is to

take responsibility to address the climate change crisis. It is important to guard against falling into anxiety and despair. Anxiety as an existential concept presents a situation almost similar to the absurd as conceived by existentialists like Albert Camus.

Albert Camus and absurdity, a case of climate crisis

One of Albert Camus' greatest master pieces is the conception of *absurd*. This is the situation in which man finds himself when faced with the attempt to understand his life meaning and the resounding silence of the world. This conundrum throws man into the state of absurdity. However, this absurdity is not nihilism. The modern world has to a larger extent "silenced god". By silencing god, I mean that man has set aside the voice of the supreme supernatural entity that guided man's behavior and towards whom man's actions were directed. The world which now seems like devoid of God renders man anxious especially faced with the catastrophe of climate change. In the face of absurdity, man is faced by the threat of opting for suicide. At such point, man's inner life has been overcome by absurdity.

Absurdity, says Camus, is also the realization of and the rejection of death. Man becomes aware of his mortality and this prompts his search for answers (Camus, 2000). Ultimately, man has to reject death of suicide and the death of inaction. Man has to keep the absurd alive. To counter or respond to the absurd, man has to develop scorn or artistic creation. In other words, the absurdity calls for rebellion. In one of his famous lectures titled "human crisis", Camus kind of predicts the possibility of people perceiving human suffering with indifference. He argues that part of humanity was lost after the World War II. Therefore, humanity views human suffering with some kind of pleasure and some sense of passivity. The human crisis referred to by Camus then is the inhumane attitude with which humanity today contemplates human suffering. This is manifested today by the passion with which most countries are on course of arms race, every country trying to outdo the other in development of sophisticated weapons of mass destruction, constant random wars and reckless pollution of environment without regard for the well-being of the most vulnerable members of the society. The human crisis is exacerbated by the advancement of ideologies that sanction harm and suffering and the failure of emergence of moral agitation in the face of suffering.

In his novel *The Plague* which was in reference to Nazi occupation and the surge of fascism, Camus describes the kind of absurdity that emerges in the face of such a plague. It is reported that during Covid-19 pandemic, there was an upward surge in the sales of the novel. The novel depicts the kinds of responses adopted by communities in the face of different kinds of *Plagues*. The characters in *The Plague*, united on the basis of common values and resisted the suffering and death (Sharpe, 2018). While people sought for insights from the *Plague* to deal with Covid-19, the insights can be borrowed and utilized to deal with different situations or phenomena that pose threat of suffering and death to man. We can therefore draw insight from the themes of the *Plague* that are articulated in the essay *The Rebel* to deal with the current force that poses the threat of suffering and death, that is climate change. The driving force behind people uniting to resist was the realization of the impending death of everyone. Everyone thought he could die next.

Climate change poses us with absurdity. Camus describes the absurdity of our world in his works *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Stranger*. He argues that while we search for meaning in life in life, the world answers us in silence due to lack of underlying meaning. Anyone who is concerned about climate feels the absurdity. This absurdity arises despite the availability of immense scientific actions and sufficient technology to support various climate action. It appears like the governments have failed to act to salvage the climate situation. The irony is that those who have contributed the least are facing the greatest consequences. It is also absurd that the global leaders have failed to act to alleviate the suffering. In Camus' thinking, it is imperative to acknowledge the absurdity. However, mere acknowledgment of the philosophy of absurdity does not take us anywhere. He asserts that we have to rebel against absurdity (Camus, 1942). The recognition of the absurdity is simply the beginning. Camus does not imply that we must surrender to the absurdity, rather we ought to each one, through rebellion, revolt, and resistance create meaning. By this, we can alleviate unwarranted suffering in the world and we create meaning by trying to reduce the suffering in the world.

According to Camus, when we unite in our suffering and act for the sake of justice, equality, and respect the meaning emerges. He argues that not only do we rebel when we are faced with the fact of people suffering, but

it is in our nature to rebel. Rebellion for Camus is one of the essential features of man (Camus, 1956). In the context of climate change, Camus' concept of rebellion can offer valuable insights. Rebellion against climate change can be in the form of acts such as resistance against climate injustice. It is worth pointing out that some movements such as Fridays for Future, the Sunrise movement, and the Extinction Rebellion conducted civil disobedience and drawing attention to climate injustices. With the exacerbation of climate impacts, there is speculation that the number of individuals who will be morally outraged will increase. Scholars also speculate on the number of actions such as industrial sabotage, civil disobedience as well as protests.

Looking at the state of affairs of the world in light of Camus's rebellion, it is safe to say that humanity is on the verge of climate rebellion as conceived by Camus' ideas. Although Camus was pessimistic about the silent nature of the world, he was simultaneously optimistic of the nature of humans and had a strong belief that man should act to alleviate suffering. Global warming poses a great human crisis similar to that described by Camus. Camus was outraged by various injustices of his time such as Nazism and other ideologies that rationalized murder and communism. These are the phenomena that prompted Camus to develop his works *The Rebel* and *The Plague*. These situations presented injustices that, according to Camus, warranted rebellion (Caraway, 1992).

Besides elements of wars and political aggressions in different parts of the world, Climate change presents the greatest threat of our time that would warrant rebellion. This threat seems to be thriving thanks to the political regimes that are largely concerned with economic rationality which tends to overlook the moral and existential concerns for human life. Climate change tends to tower over other injustices as it is a catalyst for the disturbance of order through migrations, conflicts, the spread of diseases, and deaths. The deaths attributed to climate change are alarming. WHO (2023) report indicated that climate change was responsible for approximately 150000 deaths and projected the high probability of doubling this figure by 2030. Moreover, a study by Zao et al, (2021) reported that approximately five million people died annually due to extreme heat and cold weather conditions. Another study by Bressler, (2021) indicates that there is a 100000 yearly increase in deaths related to climate change resulting from the global temperature annual increase. This scenario is likely to cause an increase of up to 83 million deaths by the year 2100. The United Nations (2023) alludes that if the warming is kept within the agreed limit of 1.5°C as per the Paris Agreement, then a million lives could be saved annually. However, there seem to be minimal chances of this rate being achieved since most countries are projecting an average increase of 2° annually. This is due to the prioritization of economic development over concern for human life.

Drawing inspiration from Camus' masterpiece *The Plague*, and faced with the reality that most governments are reluctant to initiate actions that mitigate climate change and global warming, we articulate the possibility of rebellion in apparent relation to the Plague and climate change. In the *Plague*, the local government refused to take action and recognize the plague and brushed it off as any other illness. Other members of the community also went about their normal duties as though there was nothing to be alarmed about (Sharpe, 2015). In the case of climate change, we see most governments refusing to prioritize the mitigation of the crisis. There is also a kind of climate change ambivalence among the general populace. This scenario presents a platform for the rise of rebellion as characterized by Camus. The rebel would rise beyond the general public's inaction after reaching moral clarity and standing against complacency (Stuart, 2024). The goal and the spirit here is to say no to the sufferings caused by climate change and refusal to be complicit with the government that does nothing to alleviate the sufferings or prevent them all together.

The climate rebel would say no to economic rationalization, just as the rebellious characters in Camus' *Plague* said no to suffering and the death of people especially children. Some climate rebels are already preparing legal grounds for prosecution of corporations such as oil companies that orchestrate deaths resulting from climate change (Stuart, 2024). Failure to take an action against suffering is tantamount to complacency to murder. It is based on such logic that climate inaction is arguably a form of murder, although this is still debatable. Most economic activities of many nations end up benefiting a few people in the societies as Oxfam (2023) points out that there was evidence of an increase in the world billionaires in the last ten years. This shows that while governments argue that economic growth benefits all people, it is the wealthy few that benefit largely and advance theories and ideologies that motivate climate skepticism and block any climate actions since such actions may sabotage their economic benefits. Ultimately, governments tend to abide by the wishes of the few influential wealthy individuals at the expense of the citizens. This logic advances economic progress and

increases in profits thus prioritizing nurturing economic rationalization that aims at increasing wealth at less cost. As a result, economic rationalization tends to cloud morality.

Stuart, (2024) argues that deaths caused by climate change are rationalized and this is informed by the logic that justifies as necessary the deaths that result from economic focus. Camus, however, contends that we may be so obsessed with prevailing ideologies but this does not justify mass deaths. Camus further states that rebellion results in resistance to the legitimization of murder. When one does nothing, they become complicit to murder by sitting and watching people being killed. In this light and in the context of climate change, a climate rebel will and must revolt against climate injustice as well any cabal that prevents action against climate change and injustice that comes with it. Camus would encourage us to revolt against the system and the school of thought that allows climate change harm to continue rather than acting to stop the suffering. Any school of thought rationalizing economic development over morality exacerbates harm and suffering and we must revolt against it.

Camus, in Zerofsky, (2016), poses a fundamental critical question in his lecture on human crisis; “what must we do?” This is the fundamental question with regards to climate change. He also poses the answer to his question, the answer whose significance can never be overstated. His response is that, we must call things for what they are and recognize that any time we accept certain thoughts we kill people. He argues that thinking that one is a murderer doesn’t make them think badly rather, one becomes a murderer by thinking badly and so one can be a murderer even without actually killing and this makes all of us more or less murderers. We are therefore murderers or accomplices to murder when we take no action in the face of climate change catastrophe.

When we subscribe to the logic that prizes economic excellence over morality and sensitivity to the plight of humans due to climate change or the warming caused in the process of cultivating massive economic supremacy, we become complicit to legitimized murder. However, Camus inspires us to act in revolt or rebellion. As rebels, we perceive murder and call it by name and resist it. We recognize when the limit is reached and resist and refuse to become accomplices (Camus, 1947). Camus further elaborates that it is not the case that the rebel will bow down and allow the deaths and sufferings to continue. Having attained moral clarity, the rebel confronts and resists the evil that faces him. Although the rebel knows that it is impossible to stop all evil and suffering, he knows that every effort is meaningful. This rebel emerges when they are faced with conditions that spell injustice and are incomprehensible (Camus, 1956).

Climate change is a great cause of many evils in the world today. Drawing inspiration from Camus, the rebel knows that even though he cannot single handedly stop the catastrophe of climate change, he acknowledges that any effort he takes towards stopping climate change catastrophe matters. The rebel therefore not only rebels against fossil fuel usage, but also rebels against any government or authority that promote economic rationality, prizing economic benefits over human suffering and preventing actions to stop or abate climate change. Rebellion in Camus’ understanding, is the path that is just and moral towards stopping the threats of global warming despite the unpredictability of the result.

In *Being and nothingness*, Sartre contends that man is the being that has power to create meaning of his life. In this regard, Sartre exposes the distinction between man and other beings that lack freedom to change their course. In delineating the difference and to underscore the fact of humans possessing freedom, Sartre distinguishes between two concepts of being, these are being in-itself and being for-itself. Being in itself exists as an object that is outside one’s consciousness and one that cannot change itself or alter its identity. On the other hand, man, the being-for-itself possesses freedom as a fundamental aspect of his being. This freedom enable man to transcend his facticity. It is able to make choices and this freedom to make choices causes some kind of anxiety. Since the being-for-itself is able to attain self-awareness, it differs from animals because it can consider its actions and reflect on his past, present as well as the future. Humans possess the capacity to be either nonconsciousness or consciousness. The nonconscious aspect enables humans to grasp and sometimes stagnate in their culture while the conscious aspect enables man to critically reflect on his reality and initiate a meaning-creating project for himself independent from his environment and historical situations (Sartre, 1943).

The exposing of the notion of freedom and consciousness on the being-for-itself in Sartre’s *Being and nothingness* is very crucial in reaffirming the uniqueness of man in the world. The current situation of climate

change presents man with situation where he can either as being-in-itself or being-for-itself. Either man can choose to sit and accept the situation as it is, or acknowledge his freedom and act accordingly to stop or mitigate climate change. Unlike animals, contends Sartre, man can actually take initiative and create meaning for his life in the current situation. In being and nothingness, Sartre encourages people not to rely on external forces but rather to take responsibility and take decisions without waiting for an external force to dictate to them what should happen or what course should their lives take. Sartre argues that humans are condemned to be free owing from the conception that they are born without predetermined essence and purpose.

The theoretical guidance for climate action offered by the ideas of Sartre in *Existentialism is a Humanism* cannot be underrated. It is important to take with seriousness the centrality of human's choice in the determination and establishment of his identity or what he is to become. Effectively, man is at the center of the universe and the future of the universe actually lies in his hand. It is actually on the basis of this understanding that this study seeks to establish a theoretical foundation for guiding climate action.

With the realization that his essence or meaning to his life lies in his hands, man, argues Sartre, is condemned to freedom. This comes about upon realization of the burden we have of responsibility. He acknowledges that there are certain things we cannot change about our lives like who our parents are, where we were born and when we will die. This responsibility comes with the freedom to which Sartre posits we are condemned. Denial or excuse from this responsibility amounts to living in bad faith (Sartre, 1946).

The freedom to choose comes with further responsibility to the individual. Sartre states that when choosing, the individual is not just choosing for himself, rather in choosing a certain course of action, the human acts as the legislator of the entire humanity. The implication is that the choice I make affects the whole humanity. This is a great burden on my shoulder as a human being endowed with the responsibility to care for the entire humanity. Although I am free, my freedom affects the whole humanity. This kind of philosophy would very much provide a guide for climate activity.

In choosing to emit greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, my choice has the potential to impact on the entire human race. Similarly, when I choose to mitigate or a course of action that saves the planet, I am not just choosing for myself but also the entire humanity. This concept resembles the central tenet in Kantian ethical theory where Kant argues that moral agents to act following a law that they would will that the same law to be universalized (Kant, 1785). This extended responsibility places man in a state of anguish, an unavoidable condition of man. We get into a state of anguish when we undertake actions whose consequences we cannot predict. This is a burden on everyman's shoulder, a situation that looks as though the entire humanity's eyes are fixed on the individual.

CONCLUSION

The examination of major existentialist themes with attention to climate change demonstrates the challenges humanity faces and the steps necessary to deal with them. This article is a kind of response in a manner that it provides a framework that can guide genuine and sustainable action against climate change. The article has examined in detail and demonstrated the utility of sampled existentialist philosophers whose philosophical works give valuable insights in the process of addressing climate catastrophe. The insights highlighted go beyond mere theoretical initiatives often talked about by governments in conferences and conventions. This study views that the existentialist ideas when embraced provides clearer guidance not only for individuals but to policy makers as well.

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