

The Existentialist Dilemma: Analyzing Nihilism, Anxiety, and Self-Identity in French Philosophy at the End of the 20th Century

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Abstract

This academic paper delves into the profound existentialist dilemma that characterized French philosophy at the close of the 20th century. Focused on the central themes of nihilism, anxiety, and self-identity, the analysis navigates the philosophical landscapes shaped by eminent thinkers like Sartre, Camus, de Beauvoir, and Kierkegaard. Each section unravels the existential intricacies, exploring how these themes intertwine and shape the human condition. From defining nihilism in the existentialist context to examining the portrayal of anxiety in literature and philosophy, and investigating the construction of self-identity in the face of existential challenges, the paper provides a nuanced understanding of the existentialist discourse. A critical analysis of pivotal works, including Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, Camus's *The Stranger*, de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, and Kafka's *The Trial*, offers insights into how these philosophers grapple with the complexities of existence. The results highlight commonalities and differences among existentialist thinkers, providing a comprehensive examination of the existentialist dilemma in the context of French philosophy.

Keywords: existentialism, Nihilism, anxiety, self-identity, existential dilemma, human condition, critical analysis

1. Introduction

French existentialism, a philosophical movement that emerged in the early to mid-20th century, stands as a profound exploration of human existence, freedom, and responsibility. Rooted in the aftermath of World War II and the ensuing cultural and intellectual climate, existentialist thinkers such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Simone de Beauvoir grappled with the complexities of life in a world marked by uncertainty and profound change. This introduction seeks to provide a brief overview of the historical and philosophical landscape that gave rise to French existentialism and sets the stage for a focused exploration of the existentialist dilemma.

1.1 Historical and Philosophical Context of French Existentialism

French existentialism emerged in the tumultuous aftermath of World War II, characterized by the devastation of the war, the questioning of traditional values, and a pervasive sense of disillusionment. Influenced by phenomenology and the works of philosophers like Friedrich Nietzsche and Søren Kierkegaard, French existentialists aimed to understand the nature of human existence, emphasizing individual freedom, choice, and the subjective experience of life.

1.2 The Existentialist Dilemma

At the core of French existentialism lies the existentialist dilemma—a complex interplay of themes revolving around nihilism, anxiety, and self-identity. Nihilism, the belief in the absence of inherent meaning or values, confronts individuals with a world devoid of pre-established truths. Anxiety, a central existential concept, reflects the individual's confrontation with the inherent uncertainties and responsibilities of existence. Self-identity, in the face of nihilism and anxiety, becomes a profound exploration of how individuals construct

meaning and purpose in their lives.

1.3 Research Question and Significance

This paper aims to analyze the existentialist dilemma within the context of French philosophy at the end of the 20th century. The research question guiding this exploration is: How do French existentialist thinkers address the themes of nihilism, anxiety, and self-identity in their works, and what are the implications of these explorations for understanding the human condition? By delving into these themes, we seek to unravel the philosophical depth of existentialism and its relevance in navigating the challenges of the late 20th century, shedding light on the enduring significance of existentialist thought in shaping our understanding of existence and identity.

2. Literature Review

The exploration of French existentialism requires a comprehensive understanding of its historical evolution and the foundational contributions of key thinkers who shaped its discourse. This literature review aims to trace the development of existentialist philosophy in France, highlighting the pivotal works that delve into the existentialist dilemma, focusing on themes of nihilism, anxiety, and self-identity.

2.1 Historical Evolution of French Existentialism

French existentialism found its roots in the post-World War II era, where a sense of disillusionment and questioning of established norms prevailed. To comprehend its evolution, one must first consider the precursors and philosophical movements that laid the groundwork. Existentialism drew inspiration from phenomenology, with figures like Edmund Husserl influencing existentialist thinkers. Additionally, the existential turn was greatly influenced by the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche and Søren Kierkegaard, who challenged traditional philosophical paradigms.

2.2 Key Existentialist Thinkers

Central to the development of French existentialism were intellectual giants such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Simone de Beauvoir. Sartre, a leading figure, articulated existentialist principles in works like *Being and Nothingness*, emphasizing human freedom and the responsibility that accompanies it. Camus, known for his philosophy of absurdism, explored the human struggle for meaning in an indifferent universe, notably in *The Stranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Simone de Beauvoir, a key feminist existentialist, examined themes of freedom and oppression, particularly in her groundbreaking work *The Second Sex*.

2.3 Major Works and Themes

The literature of French existentialism is rich with works that delve into the existentialist dilemma—nihilism, anxiety, and self-identity. Sartre's *Existentialism is a Humanism* elucidates key existentialist principles, while his novel *Nausea* explores the nauseating awareness of existence. Camus's *The Plague* serves as an allegory for the absurdity of life in the face of suffering. De Beauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity* critically examines the ethical dimensions of existentialist thought, especially concerning individual responsibility.

2.4 Synthesis of Themes

The existentialist thinkers collectively grappled with the overarching themes of nihilism, anxiety, and self-identity. Nihilism, as explored in Sartre's and Camus's works, questioned the existence of inherent meaning and values. Anxiety, a pervasive theme, was central to the existential experience, notably depicted in Sartre's philosophy and Camus's portrayal of the absurd. Self-identity, intricately linked to freedom and choice, was a recurring motif in de Beauvoir's feminist existentialism.

This literature review lays the foundation for the subsequent analysis by providing a nuanced understanding of the historical context, key existentialist thinkers, and their major works that form the backdrop for our exploration of the existentialist dilemma.

3. Nihilism in French Philosophy

The theme of nihilism, an existential abyss challenging the very foundations of human existence, stands as a central and profound thread within French existentialist philosophy. This section delves further into the intricate nuances of nihilism within the existentialist context, aiming to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how existentialist thinkers define nihilism, its relevance, and the specific ways in which it is engaged with in their works.

3.1 Defining Nihilism in Existentialist Thought: A Philosophical Abyss

Nihilism, within the realm of existentialism, constitutes a philosophical abyss—a rejection or skepticism of inherent meaning, values, and purpose in life. Existentialist thinkers grapple with the disconcerting notion that the universe, stripped of predetermined significance, places the profound burden of meaning-making squarely on the shoulders of the individual. This existentialist perspective on nihilism transcends mere philosophical

skepticism; it is an acknowledgment of the void, a canvas upon which individuals must paint their own meanings.

Within this existential framework, nihilism serves as a foundation for probing the fundamental questions of human existence and choice. It prompts an exploration of the individual's role in a universe devoid of inherent meaning, pushing existentialists to confront the challenge of constructing purpose and significance in the face of apparent nothingness.

3.2 *Relevance of Nihilism in Existentialist Thought: A Poignant Starting Point*

Existentialist thinkers, particularly luminaries like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, identified nihilism as a poignant starting point for their philosophical inquiries. Nihilism, rather than being a philosophical obstacle, is embraced as a catalyst for existential exploration. It accentuates the radical freedom and responsibility of the individual—forcing them to confront the vast expanse of possibilities and choices in a seemingly indifferent universe.

In the existentialist landscape, nihilism becomes a crucible wherein individuals forge their own meanings and values. It is not a void to be feared but an existential condition that propels individuals towards the authentic creation of purpose. Understanding the relevance of nihilism in existentialist thought is paramount for unraveling the complexities of the existentialist dilemma—an intricate interplay between freedom, responsibility, and the relentless pursuit of meaning.

3.3 *Works and Ideas Addressing Nihilism: Insights into the Abyss*

Jean-Paul Sartre:

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre embarks on a profound exploration of nihilism through the concept of “bad faith.” Here, individuals, confronted with the existential void, deceive themselves into denying their freedom and the accompanying responsibility. This self-deception, a response to the anxiety-inducing nature of nihilism, becomes a pivotal aspect of Sartre's existential analysis. Moreover, in his novel *Nausea*, Sartre unveils the protagonist's agonizing struggle with the inherent emptiness of existence, providing a visceral and literary engagement with nihilistic themes.

Albert Camus:

Camus, in *The Stranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus*, takes a unique path in confronting nihilism through the lens of absurdism. The absurd, characterized by the confrontation between human desire for meaning and the indifferent universe, becomes the focal point of Camus's exploration of the nihilistic condition. The character of Sisyphus, condemned to eternal futile labor, symbolizes the human struggle against the absurd and nihilistic nature of existence. Camus, through his works, presents a profound existential wrestling with the void and the search for meaning in the face of absurdity.

This exploration into nihilism within French existentialist philosophy reveals that, for these thinkers, nihilism is not a stumbling block but a philosophical battleground—a realm where individuals confront their own freedom and forge meaning in the crucible of existential choice. The engagement with nihilism becomes a transformative journey, an essential component of the broader existentialist endeavor to understand and navigate the complexities of the human condition.

Table 1. Overview of Key Existentialist Works on Nihilism

Author	Work	Key Themes
Jean-Paul Sartre	<i>Being and Nothingness</i>	Bad faith, freedom, existential anxiety
	<i>Nausea</i>	Nihilism, existential nausea
Albert Camus	<i>The Stranger</i>	Absurdism, meaninglessness
	<i>The Myth of Sisyphus</i>	Absurdism, the struggle against nihilism

Table 1 provides a concise overview of key existentialist works that address nihilism. This table serves as a reference point for readers, highlighting the diverse ways in which existentialist thinkers navigate the challenges posed by nihilism in their philosophical inquiries.

4. Anxiety in Existentialism

Within the vast expanse of existentialist philosophy, anxiety emerges as more than a fleeting emotion; it is a pervasive and fundamental theme intricately woven into the fabric of human existence. This section undertakes a comprehensive exploration of the concept of anxiety within existentialism, probing beyond its philosophical

roots to examine its vivid portrayal in literature and philosophy. The analysis extends to unravel the profound impact of existential anxiety on individuals' self-perception and worldview.

4.1 Concept of Anxiety in Existentialist Philosophy: An Existential Quandary

Existentialist thinkers, particularly Jean-Paul Sartre, recognized anxiety not merely as a psychological condition but as an essential aspect of the human experience—an existential quandary that arises from the confrontation with freedom, responsibility, and the inherent uncertainty of existence. In the existentialist context, anxiety is not an isolated feeling but a profound response to the awareness of radical freedom. The individual, realizing their autonomy to shape their destiny, grapples with the burden of responsibility that accompanies this existential freedom.

Existential anxiety becomes a poignant manifestation of the internal conflict between the desire for freedom and the weight of responsibility—anxiety serves as a compass, pointing towards the existential choices individuals must make in defining their own paths amidst the vast possibilities that freedom entails.

4.2 Portrayal of Anxiety in Literature and Philosophy: A Tapestry of Anguish

Jean-Paul Sartre:

In *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Sartre not only outlines the concept of anxiety but emphasizes its profound nature through the term “anguish.” Individuals, according to Sartre, experience anxiety when confronted with the weight of their choices, highlighting the existential burden of freedom. In the literary realm, Sartre's play *No Exit* serves as a vivid portrayal of characters ensnared in their own anxieties as they grapple with the consequences of their actions. Sartre's literary and philosophical contributions intertwine seamlessly, creating a tapestry that depicts anxiety not as a mere psychological condition but as an integral and inescapable part of the human condition.

Søren Kierkegaard:

As a precursor to existentialist thought, Kierkegaard's exploration of anxiety is profoundly articulated in his work, *The Concept of Anxiety*. Kierkegaard delves into the existential dimensions of anxiety, highlighting its deep connection to the individual's freedom, choice, and the potential for moral and spiritual transcendence. For Kierkegaard, anxiety is not a hurdle to be overcome but a transformative force that propels individuals towards a heightened awareness of their existence and the choices that define it.

4.3 Impact of Existential Anxiety on Self-Perception and Worldview: A Transformative Journey

Existential anxiety, as portrayed by existentialist thinkers, transcends the realms of emotion; it has profound implications for individuals' self-perception and worldview. The awareness of the finite nature of life, coupled with the responsibility to create meaning in the face of uncertainty, initiates a transformative process. Existential anxiety becomes a catalyst for a reevaluation of one's values, actions, and the very nature of existence.

This transformative journey prompts individuals to scrutinize their relationships, question the purpose that drives their actions, and embark on a pursuit of authenticity. Existential anxiety, rather than paralyzing, becomes a force that propels individuals towards a more profound understanding of themselves and their place in the world. The finite nature of life, when embraced in the face of anxiety, becomes a call to action—a summons to engage authentically with the world, forging connections, and pursuing a purpose that aligns with one's innermost values.

In essence, existential anxiety, explored through the lens of existentialist philosophy, becomes a gateway to self-discovery and a profound reshaping of one's worldview. Far from being a mere affliction, anxiety becomes a guide, steering individuals towards a more authentic existence—an existence shaped by the choices made in the crucible of existential freedom and responsibility.

Table 2. Themes of Anxiety in Existentialist Thought

Author	Work	Key Themes
Jean-Paul Sartre	<i>Existentialism is a Humanism</i>	Anguish, freedom, responsibility
	<i>No Exit</i>	Consequences of choices, interpersonal angst
Søren Kierkegaard	<i>The Concept of Anxiety</i>	Existential dimensions of anxiety

Table 2 provides an overview of key themes related to anxiety in existentialist thought. This table serves as a reference point for readers, elucidating the diverse ways in which existentialist thinkers conceptualize and explore the profound impact of anxiety on the human experience.

5. Self-Identity in Existentialist Thought

The exploration of self-identity holds a pivotal place in existentialist philosophy, particularly as existentialist thinkers confront the challenges posed by nihilism and anxiety. This section delves into the nuanced investigation of self-identity within existentialism, analyzing how thinkers navigate the construction of identity amidst the existentialist dilemma. Emphasis is placed on understanding the role of personal responsibility and freedom in shaping one's identity.

5.1 Notion of Self-Identity in Existentialism

Existentialism fundamentally questions traditional notions of self-identity by placing the individual at the center of their own existence. In contrast to essentialist views, existentialist thinkers contend that identity is not predetermined or fixed but is actively constructed through individual choices and engagements with the world. The existentialist notion of self-identity is deeply entwined with the themes of freedom, responsibility, and the quest for authenticity.

5.2 Construction of Identity in the Face of Nihilism and Anxiety

Jean-Paul Sartre: Sartre, a key figure in existentialism, contended that individuals are condemned to be free, implying that the responsibility to construct one's identity is an unavoidable burden. In *Being and Nothingness*, he explores the idea that individuals must confront the nothingness within themselves, acknowledging the absence of a predetermined essence. The construction of identity, therefore, becomes a continual process of choice and commitment in the face of existential challenges.

Simone de Beauvoir: As a feminist existentialist, de Beauvoir examined the construction of identity in the context of gender and societal expectations. In *The Second Sex*, she argued that women, like men, must actively define their identity rather than succumb to predefined roles. De Beauvoir's existentialist feminism underscores the idea that personal responsibility and freedom are crucial for authentic self-identity.

5.3 Role of Personal Responsibility and Freedom

Existentialist thought places immense importance on personal responsibility and freedom in shaping one's identity. The concept of "bad faith," introduced by Sartre, warns against self-deception and encourages individuals to take ownership of their choices. Personal responsibility entails a recognition of one's agency in defining values and assuming accountability for actions. Freedom, as a cornerstone of existentialism, is both a liberating force and a source of existential angst, as individuals navigate the vast possibilities and consequences of their choices.

Table 3. Depiction of Self-Identity in Existentialist Literature

Author	Work	Key Themes
Jean-Paul Sartre	<i>Being and Nothingness</i>	Freedom, responsibility, construction of identity
Simone de Beauvoir	<i>The Second Sex</i>	Feminism, societal expectations, self-definition

Table 3 provides an overview of key themes related to self-identity in existentialist literature. This table serves as a reference point for readers, illustrating the diverse ways in which existentialist thinkers explore and depict the construction of identity in the face of the existentialist dilemma.

6. Critical Analysis

The critical analysis of selected existentialist works is an intellectual voyage into the complexities of the existentialist dilemma, exploring the intricate interplay of nihilism, anxiety, and self-identity. In this section, we embark on a detailed examination of key works by eminent existentialist thinkers, seeking to unravel the profound insights they offer into the existentialist themes that have captivated philosophical discourse.

6.1 Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness: The Abyss of Freedom*

Sartre's magnum opus, *Being and Nothingness*, stands as a cornerstone of existentialist philosophy, offering a profound exploration of the existentialist dilemma. Within the tapestry of Sartre's thought, nihilism is confronted through the existential anguish of characters who grapple with the absence of inherent meaning. The concept of "bad faith" is a central motif, illustrating how individuals deceive themselves into denying their freedom and the weighty responsibilities it carries. The construction of self-identity, intricately linked to existential choices, unfolds amidst the vast nothingness. Sartre's existentialist lens unveils the transformative impact of personal responsibility and freedom, shaping one's identity within the void.

6.2 Albert Camus's *The Stranger: Absurdity and Indifference*

Camus's *The Stranger* explores the absurdity of human existence, presenting the protagonist, Meursault, as an embodiment of the indifferent universe. Nihilism permeates the narrative through Meursault's detached outlook and his indifference to societal norms. Anxiety weaves through the storyline as Meursault confronts the absurdity of life and the lack of inherent meaning. The construction of self-identity becomes a poignant exploration as Meursault grapples with his actions and choices. Camus's work provides a unique lens on nihilism, unraveling its impact on personal identity within an absurd and indifferent world, where individual choices reverberate against the backdrop of cosmic indifference.

6.3 Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex: Liberation and Authenticity*

As a foundational work in existentialist feminism, de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* critically examines the construction of self-identity within the gendered framework of societal expectations. Nihilism is confronted through the lens of women's liberation, challenging preconceived notions and advocating for an authentic self. Anxiety emerges as a pervasive force in the societal pressures faced by women, urging them to define their identity authentically against oppressive norms. De Beauvoir's exploration of self-identity emphasizes the role of personal responsibility and freedom, arguing for women's active participation in shaping their destinies within a world grappling with existential challenges.

6.4 Søren Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling: The Leap of Faith*

Kierkegaard, a precursor to existentialism, delves into the theme of anxiety in *Fear and Trembling*. Through the profound narrative of Abraham and Isaac, Kierkegaard explores existential anxiety arising from the collision between ethical norms and individual faith. Nihilism is confronted through the lens of religious existentialism, where faith becomes a response to the apparent meaninglessness of existence. The construction of self-identity is intricately entwined with the leap of faith, emphasizing the subjective engagement of the individual with the world and the profound personal responsibility inherent in such a leap.

6.5 Franz Kafka's *The Trial: Navigating the Kafkaesque Abyss*

While not explicitly existentialist, Kafka's *The Trial* offers profound insights into the existentialist dilemma. The narrative, marked by absurdity and a Kafkaesque bureaucracy, addresses the theme of nihilism through Josef K.'s futile struggle for meaning. Anxiety pervades the narrative as K. navigates an incomprehensible and oppressive system, reminiscent of existential struggles against the absurdities of societal and bureaucratic structures. The construction of self-identity is thwarted by external forces, reflecting the existentialist plight against societal and bureaucratic absurdity, where individual agency is stifled by the overwhelming forces of an indifferent and inscrutable system.

This critical analysis transcends mere exploration; it is a profound excavation into the depths of existentialist thought, providing nuanced understandings of how these pivotal works contribute to our comprehension of the existentialist dilemma. Each work, a unique masterpiece, becomes a vessel carrying distinct perspectives, enriching our exploration of the existentialist landscape and deepening our understanding of the intricate dance between nihilism, anxiety, and self-identity within the vast theater of the human condition.

7. Results

The culmination of our literature review and critical analysis of key existentialist works has revealed profound insights into the existentialist dilemma, specifically concerning nihilism, anxiety, and self-identity. Through an exploration of the works of Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Simone de Beauvoir, Søren Kierkegaard, and Franz Kafka, commonalities and differences have emerged, providing a nuanced understanding of how these thinkers grapple with the existentialist themes.

7.1 Nihilism in Existentialist Thought

Across the selected works, existentialist thinkers converge in their confrontation with nihilism, acknowledging the absence of inherent meaning or values in the human experience. Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, though differing in their philosophical approaches, both depict characters who navigate a world devoid of pre-established truths. Sartre's concept of "bad faith" and Camus's portrayal of the absurd highlight the individual's responsibility to construct meaning in the face of nihilistic challenges.

7.2 Anxiety as a Central Theme

Existential anxiety emerges as a central and unifying theme in the selected works. Sartre, Camus, and Kierkegaard all explore the profound impact of anxiety on individuals' perception of freedom, choice, and the inherent uncertainties of existence. The characters in *Being and Nothingness*, *The Stranger*, and *Fear and Trembling* grapple with existential angst, illustrating the universal nature of anxiety as a fundamental aspect of the human condition.

7.3 Construction of Self-Identity

While existentialist thinkers share an emphasis on the active construction of self-identity, their approaches exhibit notable differences. Sartre, in *Being and Nothingness*, underscores the individual's radical freedom and responsibility in shaping their identity. De Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, extends this exploration to the realm of gender, advocating for women's agency in defining their own identities. Camus and Kafka, through Meursault and Josef K., respectively, portray characters thwarted in their attempts to construct self-identity by external forces, adding a layer of existential absurdity.

7.4 Role of Personal Responsibility and Freedom

The examination of personal responsibility and freedom as foundational aspects of existentialism reveals both commonalities and distinctions. Sartre's concept of radical freedom and "bad faith" underscores the weight of personal responsibility, a theme echoed in the works of Camus and Kierkegaard. De Beauvoir extends the discourse to address gendered societal expectations, emphasizing freedom as a means to authentic self-identity. The role of personal responsibility and freedom emerges as a dynamic interplay, shaping the existential choices individuals make in the construction of their identities.

In presenting the findings, it becomes evident that existentialist thinkers, while united in their exploration of the existentialist dilemma, offer diverse perspectives on nihilism, anxiety, and self-identity. These nuanced insights contribute to a richer understanding of the human condition, highlighting the complexity and depth inherent in existentialist thought. The commonalities and differences among these thinkers provide a comprehensive framework for navigating the existentialist landscape and grappling with the profound questions that define our existence.

8. Discussion

The exploration of nihilism, anxiety, and self-identity within the framework of French existentialism has yielded profound insights, prompting a discussion that contextualizes the results within the overarching research question. Moreover, the implications of these findings extend to a broader understanding of existentialism and its relevance at the close of the 20th century.

8.1 Interpreting the Results in the Context of the Research Question

The central research question guiding this paper was: How do French existentialist thinkers address the themes of nihilism, anxiety, and self-identity in their works, and what are the implications of these explorations for understanding the human condition? The findings from the critical analysis of key works by Sartre, Camus, de Beauvoir, Kierkegaard, and Kafka illuminate the multifaceted responses to the existentialist dilemma.

Nihilism: The existentialist thinkers collectively grapple with nihilism as a foundational challenge. Sartre and Camus confront the void of meaning through different lenses—Sartre emphasizing individual responsibility and choice, while Camus explores the absurdity of existence. Nihilism, in this context, becomes a dynamic force, compelling individuals to actively construct meaning in the face of an indifferent universe.

Anxiety Existential anxiety emerges as a universal theme, transcending individual works and thinkers. Whether through Sartre's philosophy, Camus's portrayal of the absurd, or Kierkegaard's exploration of faith, anxiety is revealed as an inherent aspect of human existence. The analysis underscores the role of anxiety in shaping individuals' perception of freedom, choice, and the challenges posed by the existentialist dilemma.

Self-Identity: The construction of self-identity emerges as a complex and dynamic process, influenced by personal responsibility and freedom. Sartre's radical freedom, Camus's portrayal of characters constrained by absurdity, de Beauvoir's feminist lens, and Kierkegaard's leap of faith all contribute to a nuanced understanding of how individuals navigate the existentialist landscape to define their own identities.

8.2 Implications for Understanding Existentialism

The implications of these findings extend beyond individual works, offering a comprehensive view of existentialism as a philosophy deeply rooted in the human experience. Existentialism, as revealed through the selected works, serves as a profound inquiry into the nature of existence, the responsibilities and freedoms that come with it, and the perpetual quest for authentic self-identity.

Relevance of Existentialism: At the close of the 20th century, existentialism remains relevant as a philosophical framework for grappling with the persistent uncertainties of the human condition. The existentialist themes of freedom, responsibility, and the construction of meaning resonate in a world marked by rapid social, cultural, and technological changes. The existentialist lens provides a timeless toolkit for individuals to navigate the challenges posed by nihilism, anxiety, and the ongoing quest for self-identity.

Human Condition and Existentialism: The findings underscore existentialism's enduring relevance in shaping our understanding of the human condition. The exploration of existential themes prompts a reflection on the universal struggles individuals face in defining their existence, making choices, and confronting the inherent

uncertainties of life. Existentialism, as illuminated through the lens of the selected works, offers a philosophical roadmap for individuals seeking meaning and authenticity in their lives.

In conclusion, the discussion of nihilism, anxiety, and self-identity within French existentialism provides a nuanced exploration of the existentialist dilemma. The findings not only contribute to a deeper understanding of the selected works but also shed light on the broader implications for understanding existentialism and its continued significance in the complex landscape of the late 20th century and beyond. Existentialism, as a philosophy of engagement and personal responsibility, offers a timeless perspective on the human experience, inviting individuals to actively shape their identities and meaning in the face of an ever-evolving world.

9. Conclusion

The exploration of nihilism, anxiety, and self-identity within the realm of French existentialism has led to profound insights, offering a comprehensive understanding of the existentialist dilemma. As we conclude our journey through the works of key existentialist thinkers, this section summarizes the main findings and reflects on the enduring significance of existentialist philosophy in addressing the complexities of the human condition.

Nihilism: The existentialist thinkers, including Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, collectively grappled with nihilism as a central challenge. Whether through Sartre's concept of "bad faith" or Camus's exploration of the absurd, the works examined in this paper underscore the existential imperative to actively construct meaning in the absence of inherent values.

Anxiety: Existential anxiety emerges as a pervasive theme, transcending individual works and serving as a fundamental aspect of the existentialist dilemma. From Sartre's philosophy of anguish to Camus's portrayal of characters confronting the absurdity of existence, anxiety is revealed as a profound force shaping individuals' perception of freedom and the responsibilities inherent in choice.

Self-Identity: The construction of self-identity emerges as a dynamic and multifaceted process influenced by personal responsibility and freedom. Jean-Paul Sartre's emphasis on radical freedom, Simone de Beauvoir's feminist exploration, and Albert Camus's depiction of characters constrained by absurdity collectively contribute to a nuanced understanding of how individuals navigate the existentialist landscape to define their own identities.

Existentialist philosophy, as illuminated through the works of Sartre, Camus, de Beauvoir, and others, holds enduring significance in addressing the existentialist dilemma. At the heart of existentialism is the recognition that individuals are confronted with a world devoid of pre-established meaning—a world where the responsibility to create meaning lies squarely on the shoulders of the individual.

The significance of existentialism lies in its emphasis on human agency, freedom, and the active construction of meaning. In a world marked by uncertainty, existentialism offers a philosophical framework that empowers individuals to confront the challenges of nihilism, navigate the complexities of anxiety, and actively shape their identities. The existentialist call to personal responsibility resonates as a timeless invitation to engage authentically with the world, making choices that define one's existence.

Existentialism's relevance extends beyond its historical roots in post-World War II France. It provides a philosophical toolkit for individuals in the late 20th century and beyond to grapple with the perennial questions of existence. In a rapidly changing world, where traditional values may be questioned, and uncertainties abound, existentialism offers a guiding philosophy for those seeking purpose and authenticity.

As we conclude our exploration of the existentialist dilemma, we are reminded that existentialism is not merely a philosophical discourse of the past; it is a living philosophy that resonates with the ongoing quest for meaning and identity. The existentialist thinkers, through their literary and philosophical contributions, invite us to reflect on the human experience, confront the void of meaning, and actively shape our identities in a world where the only certainty is the uncertainty of existence.

In essence, existentialist philosophy stands as a beacon, guiding individuals through the labyrinth of the human condition. It is a philosophy that celebrates the freedom to create, the responsibility to choose, and the perpetual journey of constructing meaning in a world that, at times, may seem indifferent. As we bid farewell to our exploration, the echoes of existentialism linger—a profound reminder that, in the face of the existentialist dilemma, our existence is both a challenge and an opportunity to author our own narratives.

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