Waiting For Godot Why Cannot Hope Be Fulfilled?

It is says that every action in life is the fruit of a choice, while choices are the result of some sort of motivation guided by ideas and desires. If one needs milk, he will leave his home, turn right or left to follow the path leading to the corner store. If one needs nothing, he will wonder if he takes left or right for he has no path to follow. Goals are a necessity when it comes to action. From the moment that intelligence has stroke humans mind; people has been wondering about the meaning of existence. While the entire humanity has been “waiting” for an answer, it seems that the hope of grabbing it is closely linked to the absence of fundamental truth in life. If hope comes from an unfulfilled need or desire; then hope shall never be fulfilled in order to remain “hope”.

In the text, we explore the meaningless existence of two individuates “waiting for Godot”, Vladimir and Estragon. They are not satisfied with their life and believe in the irrevocable necessity of an answer such as damnation or salvation. This essay’s main objective is to point out the consequences of a life based on only hope which annihilate the prospect of actions. I shall approach this scheme with the use of the concept of existentialism. Thorough this essay, I shall make use of this concept to understand the behaviour of the main characters, in the tale, with the intention of blaming hope as being the protagonist of their lack of actions. I will explain the nature of hope and finally, I will bond the concept of absurdity to the text in order to explain certain behaviours of the characters.

What does the Concept, of Existentialism, has to do with the Story?

The concept of existentialism can be, to a certain extent, explained by one of Jean-Paul Sartre’s statement; *“Man is nothing else, but what he makes of himself.”* This is an interesting part of the concept of existentialism; therefore, the one I will explore to link this concept to the text. A man can decides to believe in anything he wants or wait for whoever he wants, as this being called a \*free will\* according to one’s actions. *“What are we doing here, that is the question. And we are blessed in this that we happen to know the answer. Yes, in this immense confusion one thing alone is clear. We are waiting for Godot to come”* - Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot.* First, this extract goes in opposition to the concept of existentialism. Vladimir considers himself blessed to know what he is waiting for. He is waiting for Godot. In the meanwhile, Vladimir has no idea who Godot is and if this same one will actually damn him or save him. His life and behaviour make no sense “*this immense confusion”* and he believes in the “rationality” that Godot will bring a change in his existence. This reasoning is absurd for he has no idea who Godot is and what he will do for him. The only change will be that Vladimir will not have to wait for Godot anymore. What will be next? He will wait for Godot to speak? Existentialism is an exit door to the “hope” torment because it brings out the concept that there is no absolute truth in the world and therefore; it is meaningless to keep waiting for an answer. In the *immense confusion* which is called life; to believe in God can be a comfort for some people, including Vladimir (in the beginning of the text).

Someone who hopes for something will not necessary get it. Someone who works for something is more likely going to reach it: *The* “I would like to be rich *visit the* I work eighty hours a week in order to become rich” is a choice; one is passive and the other is active, one generates hope while the other generates results. Hope is a torment that makes individuals accept their fate and become passive about their own misery. Existentialists are not saying that one should not believe in anything but mostly that there is no rationality in the world and therefore; you can believe in anything you want if it makes you happy. If something does not make you happy anymore, you can just forget about it and believe in something else. This goes against the principle of Christianity according to their belief of knowing the absolute truth when it comes to the meaning of existence.

To sum up; the characters in the book only rely on hope “Godot” to put an end to their misery. Vladimir has his empty hat which keeps him from thinking more freely with his own ideas while Estragon desires to get rid of the pebble in his boot in order to be capable of executing more actions. The concept of existentialism would bring an exit door to the belief they are jailed in as Gobot, God or hope, being their only redemption. If hope or faith stop being a part of their existence; they would not only start to think by themselves but also would they bring up the changes they need, for a better life, by their own actions.

What is the True Nature of Hope?

*"*[*Zeus*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zeus) *did not want man to throw his life away, no matter how much the other evils might torment him, but rather to go on letting himself be tormented anew. To that end, he gives man hope. In truth, it is the most evil of evils because it prolongs man's torment."* - [Friedrich Nietzsche](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friedrich_Nietzsche), 1878, [*Human, All Too Human*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human,_All_Too_Human).

After Prometheus had stolen the secret of fire to give it to humans, the gods decided to punish humanity… for the secret of fire would make mankind powerful and perhaps, their power would go beyond gods’ power. In order to control humanity, or to protect them against their own nature, Zeus thought necessary to create Pandora, the greatest punishment for mankind. Pandora, an innocent woman gifted (cursed) by gods, was the keeper of a box containing all the plagues in the world; madness, illnesses, hidden desires and hope. Once she had opened the box, out of curiosity, all the evils inside of it were released and only hope remained at the bottom of the box. The interesting part of this is that Pandora opened the box a second time in order to give hope to humankind so they don’t lose faith in an eventual redemption from evil. Hope, slowly, escaped the box with great difficulties. Why was it so difficult for hope to fly out of the box? Perhaps hope was heavier than the other curses and therefore; stronger. What if hope would actually mean faith? Is faith the worst plague on earth for leading to torment?

In the text, there is a young messenger who keeps bringing hope, to Vladimir and Estragon, of an eventual coming of Godot.

* Boy: I mind the goats, Sir.
* Vladimir: Is he good to you?
* Boy: Yes Sir.
* Vladimir: He doesn't beat you?
* Boy: No Sir, not me.
* Vladimir: Whom does he beat?
* Boy: He beats my brother, Sir.
* Vladimir: Ah, you have a brother?
* Boy: Yes Sir.
* Vladimir: What does he do?
* Boy: He minds the sheep, Sir.

In this context the term “beat” can be replaced by “torment”. The boy minds the goats, he is a free thinker and **hope** *(Godot)* does not **torment** *(hurt)* him. In the bible, God is supposed to separate the free thinkers *(goats)* from the believers *(sheep)* and hold the sheep in his right hand and the goats in his left hand. Why keep a strong hold *(right hand)* on the dominated believers and followers? Because God shall only have a control on the believers and *“left”* the free thinkers behind for they do not wish to follow. If one decides to have faith or hope, he will be tormented by the waiting and expectations generated by it. He will hurt himself against the despair in a meaningless existence without God (hope). He will wait to be saved while drowning instead of believing he only has to swim to save himself.

In short; hope is a curse for humanity. *“But at this place, at this moment of time, all mankind is us, whether we like it or not. Let us make the most of it, before it is too late! Let us represent worthily for once the foul brood to which a cruel fate consigned us! It is true that when with folded arms we weigh the pros and cons we are no less a credit to our species.”*- Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot.* At this moment, Vladimir wants to make an action; he wants to be a saviour for Pozzo... or for himself? For the first time, he stops waiting and goes in action. He makes a move to save himself before it is too late.

Where is the Line between Existentialism and Absurdity in the Story?

According to Albert Camus about the **Absurd**; *“absurdity is a feeling which arises from the confrontation of the world, which is irrational, with the hopeless but profound human desire to make sense of our condition.”* The philosophy of existentialism is somehow related to the concept of absurdity although less dramatic. Existentialists stipulate that there is no absolute truth in life while the philosophy of absurdity implies that the existence of human being has no meaning at all and is consequently absurd. When one believe in absurdity, his only way out would be, according to Albert Camus, to live in full consciousness of the world as being irrational and therefore; accept the fact that everything is meaningless. Of course, it would suggest that life itself is meaningless and bring some people to see suicide as a relief, while others would hang on to transcendent beliefs which is seen, for Albert Camus, as a “philosophical suicide”.

In the context of the text “Waiting for Godot” we experience an interesting combination of Existentialism and Absurdity. The heroes live in an absurd reality where nothing makes sense. Not only are they questioning the meaning of their existence but they also believe in a transcendent force coming to bring certain logic to their life which only results in waiting. The reason why the tale can be perceived as absurd is due to the fact that their ideas always go in contradiction with their actions so they end up living in a perpetual circle of non-accomplished desires. Pozzo: *“Gentlemen, I don't know what came over me. Forgive me. Forget all I said. I don't remember exactly what it was, but you may be sure there wasn't a word of truth in it.”-* Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot.* I would think that Pozzo is in fact Vladimir but on another perspective of time; on the opposite of Vladimir... Pozzo, in an ironic way, has accepted life as being absurd as to say that all we have to be sure of is that nothing was true about it. Let us pretend that Pozzo is the becoming of Vladimir in the third act (although there is no such act in the story). In the first part of the text, even though Vladimir is really conscious of all the imminent circumstances of his life; he never question the existence of Godot nor even the upcoming events. In the meanwhile, during the second act, Vladimir starts to understand what is going on and not only is he not surprised to see the boy a second time, but also is he able to predict the boy’s announcement.

Vladimir: You have a message from Mr. Godot.

Boy: Yes Sir.

Vladimir: He won't come this evening.

Boy: No Sir.

Vladimir: But he'll come tomorrow.

Boy: Yes Sir.

Vladimir: Without fail.

Boy: Yes Sir.

To make it short; there is no line separating the concept of existentialism and absurdity in the story. In the beginning of the text, Vladimir only related to the hope of coming across the truth about the meaning of his existence. In the end of the text, he understands how his life is going to turn out to be a perpetual resumption if he keeps on waiting for Godot. *“Vladimir: Tomorrow, when I wake, or think I do, what shall I say of today? That I waited for Godot? But in all that what truth will there be? (Vladimir looks at Estragon.) He'll know nothing. He'll tell me about the blows he received and I'll give him a carrot. Astride of a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave digger puts on the forceps. We have time to grow old. The air is full of our cries. But habit is a great deadener.”-* Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot.* Vladimir then understood that the constant waiting for hope will never bring anything new to his life; on the contrary, habit is a great deadener just as relying on a pre-established truth kills the mind. So both existentialism and absurdity come from the same tree. From my point of view; the first is a waving hand to let go of non-fundamental beliefs in order to start reasoning by our own capacities and the second, absurdity, is the reasoning to be done in order to let go off other insignificant beliefs once we understand the philosophy of existentialism.

In Conclusion:

“Waiting for Godot” has been, for me, a way to lose hold on my own “so important” existence in the world. I believe it as to be one of Samuel Beckett’s intentions about his book when it comes to the importance that mankind accords to the meaning of life. The quest to reach the absolute truth has not only brought many people to die in the name of their beliefs but it has also kept many people from believing in their own power of actions. I believe that Samuel Beckett’s message is about stopping to rely on exterior, irrational and invisible’s force to change the course of our existence. His play is a picture of the consequences, of such beliefs, on people’s life. If you cannot rely on some sort of “by the book” absolute truth; you can either start to believe in yourself or die. To me, it sounds much better than believing in something such as the power of “hope” which will, in the end, disappoints me and turns out to have been very much useless in my existence.