

**THE HUMAN CONDITION AND REPRESSIVE
REGIMES: A READING OF THE
EXISTENTIALIST VALUES IN THE SELECTED
WORKS OF KAFKA, KOBAYASHI AND
GOMIKAWA**

**BY
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**The Human Condition and Repressive Regimes: A Reading of the
Existentialist Values in the Selected Works of Kafka, Kobayashi
and Gomikawa**

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ABSTRACT

Title: The Human Condition and Repressive Regimes: A Reading of Existential Values in the Selected Works of Kafka, Kobayashi and Gomikawa

This study seeks to draw comparisons and simultaneously abridge the philosophical gap between the existentialist theories of Hannah Arendt and the Kyoto School, considerably those of Nishida Kitaro and Keiji Nishitani. Franz Kafka's short story "The Penal Colony" is interpreted along with the first volume of Junpei Gomikawa and Masaki Kobayashi's film, *The Human Condition* under the theorization of Hannah Arendt and the Kyoto School to address the existential problem of the human condition shaped by oppressive regimes. A mixed methodology of Qualitative Content Analysis and hermeneutics has been deployed for interpreting the selected works. The discussion and the analysis highlight the common understanding of how oppressive regimes normalize violent and abnormal acts, which is explained under concepts such as the Banality of Evil, the theory of political action, the logic of absolute nothingness, and the rise of fascism around the period of World War Two. The Hermeneutic Content Analysis revealed two different approaches to the problem of existentialism (the human condition) put forth by Hannah Arendt and the Kyoto School. While Arendt's lens recognizes life's inherent absurdity, the latter uses spiritual ideals such as those of Zen Buddhism to ascribe a meaning beyond nihilism, advocating for individual action deprived of 'ego', 'self', and 'being'. This approach emphasizes mindfulness and the interconnectedness of all things, encouraging a compassionate and selfless way of living. By transcending personal desires and attachments, individuals can find a deeper sense of purpose and harmony within the universe, aligning their actions with a greater spiritual truth.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

This study will explore the works of Masaki Kobayashi and Franz Kafka to develop a synthesis or a dialogue between the 20th-century philosophy of Hannah Arendt and modern Japanese scholars. By drawing creatively on the spiritual and intellectual traditions of East Asia, they created novel philosophical systems, those of Mahāyāna Buddhism especially vis-à-vis existential nihilism. The main focus of this study will be to address the existential nihilism embodied in the characters presented by the authors in their works. This depiction of existential nihilism in the face of an unjust government or external socio-political circumstances, which seems to render its subjects considerably miserable, will be addressed as the human condition. This thesis analyses the existential problem of the human condition shaped by oppressive regimes. To attend to the existential threats posed by such governments, this research will use the political theory of Hannah Arendt, expounded in her book *The Human Condition*. She was a German political philosopher, an author, and a Holocaust survivor. Her theory of political action is instead focused on existential values, and morality is often side-lined by it. One can say that her primary focus is on existential values, which she calls “political action” (Arendt 199). Since this study aims to draw parallels between Hannah Arendt’s theory and the philosophy of The Kyoto School, this research will analyze the first volume of a Japanese film trilogy called *The Human Condition*, published in six volumes from 1956 to 1958 by Junpei Gomikawa, and adapted into a film by Masaki Kobayashi. This study will also consider Franz Kafka’s selected short story, “The Penal Colony” as this literary work deals with the existential issue of the human condition considered in modern Western philosophy. This study aims to emphasize the imbrications that exist between Arendt’s theory and the philosophical approach used by The Kyoto School. The reason for juxtaposing the two aforementioned theories is two-fold. Firstly, this thesis will analyze the human condition where the Kyoto School philosophers deal with the quandary of existential nihilism: Nishida Kitaro and Keiji Nishitani. Secondly, since the human condition is always an indirect or direct result of oppression, this study will draw parallels between Hannah Arendt’s political theory and The Kyoto School back and forth.

Arendt dedicated much of her work to studying the rise of totalitarian regimes in the 20th century, specifically in Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia. Her analysis revealed that these regimes went beyond traditional forms of authoritarianism, representing a unique and oppressive form of political control. In Arendt's view, totalitarianism was characterized by an all-encompassing desire for manipulation and domination over society, leading to a profound sense of powerlessness and isolation among individuals (22).

The Human Condition, a Japanese trilogy by Masaki Kobayashi, depicts the life of Kaji, a naive and idealistic man who goes through various roles in the labor camp, the army, and the Soviet captivity during World War II. Kaji constantly struggles to overcome a system that is corrupt and oppressive. The novel is not only a depiction of Japan's raw wartime mentality, but it is also a personal existential tragedy of its protagonist's (Kaji) journey through a convoluted political web in modernizing Japan.

Franz Kafka was a writer of visionary fiction in German, whose works—such as the novel *The Trial* (1925) and the story “The Metamorphosis” (1915)—conveyed the feelings of anxiety and estrangement that many people experienced in Europe in the 20th century. His selected short stories unravel a significant theme of justice and existentialism. It reflects on Plato's question of “what is justice,” and it explores what constitutes fair and due process in any society (*Nicomachean Ethics* VI.13). “The Penal Colony” is about the execution of a prisoner who was sentenced to death by a senior officer without a trial. When governments in power attack human dignity, Arendt argues that this is the real “evil” (Arendt 187). Hence, according to her, evil is always a threat to the existential values of humans.

In this proposed dissertation, the human condition is defined as the state that arises when both external and internal factors challenge the existential values of people. However, it is defined as “all of the characteristics and key events that compose the essentials of human existence” (Welch 167). The term's connotation is rather political in the research. Hence, the human condition is the condition of existential angst and nihilism caused by socio-political oppression and injustice. In Arendt's book *The Human Condition*, she believes that political action grows out of existential values. She called such political action as “vita activa” (Arendt 301). The action safeguards basic existential values that add up to “human dignity” (298). Human dignity consist of “human status” and “human stature” (299). The former is a

“not animal-like” state in her words. (Arendt 299). The latter allows citizens to use their freedom in art, thought, and aesthetics. This means that when “vita active” is endangered by some external force (totalitarianism) and by internal factors (existential nihilism), the existential values are challenged (Arendt 251). This reduces human status to a mere “animal-like” state, resulting in a despairing depiction of the human condition.

The term human nature, according to Kaebnick, is the “fundamental dispositions and traits of humans” (23). The term is often used to denote the essence of humankind or the ontological position of “being” (23). Kobayashi’s treatment of human nature conjures it up as somewhat irrational and, at times evil. Arendt’s treatment of “evil” poses a similar conjunction when she talks about the “banality of evil” in her work *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (78). Arendt argues that evil has become banal or commonplace because it is a totalitarian subject’s essence (being). Although we understand evil as a deviant abnormality, Arendt declares that totalitarian evil is ordinary, organised, and even lawful in modern bureaucracies. It has seeped into the ordinary and can be seen as a part of human nature. There is a certain delusion and “thoughtlessness” attached to totalitarian evil (78). Eichmann, who facilitated the murder of countless Jews in the Holocaust said, “I never killed any human being. I never gave an order to kill” (Arendt 206). Dostoyevsky puts forward the same predicament when he writes, “In short, I maintain that all great men or even men a little out of the common, that is to say, capable of giving some new word, must from their very nature be criminals more or less, of course” (Dostoyevsky 102). The concept of nurture denotes all the environmental variables, whereas nature is considered innate. The human condition encompasses a synthesis of both nature and nurture.

The role of The Kyoto School in my research is essential to off-setting Western existentialist philosophy such as Arendt’s with an ontologically alternative paradigm. While Arendt’s political theory provides a Western lens to analyse the systemic evil that results in existential loss, the Kyoto School assimilates Arendt’s philosophy to reformulate a moral insight unique to East Asian culture and tradition. I do this to develop an East/West dialogue with respect to the human condition and to reinforce that the predicament of existential nihilism is universal. German idealism has influenced modern Japanese philosophy to a great extent, and the Kyoto School has found grounds to address the question of

existentialism and nihilism in a very sound fashion. Where 20th-century Western philosophy about existentialism seems largely concerned with the ontological exploration of “being”, the thought offered by the Kyoto School’s members like Nishida and Nishitani is a standpoint towards the notion of “absolute nothingness” (Nishitani 97). This means that emptiness is true emptiness only when it relinquishes even the perspective that portrays it as an entity that embodies emptiness that is to say that the “true emptiness is to be realized as something united to and self-identical with being” (Nishida 322). Whereas the pessimistic nihilism that had infected the West for the last two centuries, blowing things out of proportion by providing a rather bleak view of modernization, the Kyoto School’s stance on absolute nothingness is the one that dissolves the “ego-self” and seeks redemption by self-transcendence (Nishida 299). What, then, follows is not the feeling of isolation that has infected the modern world but a sense of connectedness and wholeness. To put it simply, the philosophers of the Kyoto School pursue truth above all, and they defend the validity of seeing the world and the self in certain ways. These scholars have one or another concept of absolute nothingness and they strive towards an understanding of genuine awareness of self by way of voiding the ego (Nishida 309).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Franz Kafka and Masaki Kobayashi portrayal of the human condition represents the physical exploitation and cerebral manipulation of subjectivities at the hands of modern repressive totalitarian regimes, leading to existential angst. The consequence of the ‘banal evil’ of state instruments is the trajectory that the human condition takes from existential angst to either nihilism or conversely ‘non-being’, which can be fully realized by bringing Arendt’s existentialist theorization of modernity into dialogue with the alternative theorization of overcoming modernity through meontology developed by the Kyoto School.

The objectives of this study will be attained by answering the following questions:

1. What bearing does the difference between Western “being” and Eastern “no-self” have on the human condition subjected to ruthless modern state machinations?

2. How can differing interpretations of the human condition, depicted in the selected works of Kafka and Kobayashi, be made in light of the critique of modernity offered by Arendt and the Kyoto School respectively?
3. What are the variations between the existentialist conceptualisations of self, state, and subjectivity/citizenship in the works of Kafka and Kobayashi?

1.1 Literature Review

1.1.1 Defining Existentialism

Existentialism offers greater significance on the topics related to human existence. It was originally put forth in the works of Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55) in the early nineteenth century. His books *Fear and Trembling* (1843), *The Concept of Dread* (1844), and *Sickness Unto Death* (1848) prominently contain existential beliefs (Lippitt et al. 1). Starting from the 20th century, within the works of Simone de Beauvoir, Dostoevsky, Albert Camus, Kafka and Heidegger, irrespective of their religious beliefs, these scholars of existential thought argue that existence leads to essence, calling into question the prejudged and biased beliefs that the true nature of life cannot be explained, and that presumptuous philosophers used to describe life in this particular way. Jean-Paul Sartre dispenses new prospects for existentialism through his plays, novels and other philosophical literature.

Existential nihilism is a philosophical assessment that tries to find the answers to questions relating to the nature of meaning, existence and the human condition embedded in existentialism and nihilism. This encompasses the viewpoint that life lacks purpose, value or inherent meaning. It asserts that there is no ultimate purpose to our existence which is why any meaning attributed to life is not a fundamental truth but a human construction. As a result, when human beings grapple with the idea of a seemingly indifferent universe, this philosophical outlook often leads individuals to confront feelings of existential despair.

Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is one of the foundational works in the exploration of existential nihilism. In this powerful novel, Nietzsche introduces the concept of "eternal recurrence" suggesting that life's events will endlessly repeat themselves (Maden).

Thus he challenged the notions of growth, evolution and meaningful existence. Similarly, another important work is Jean-Paul Sartre's "Being and Nothingness". Here Sartre examines the nature of consciousness and the anxiety that comes with the realization of the absurdity of existence.

The Myth of Sisyphus by Albert Camus' is a momentous essay that captures the spirit of existential nihilism. The titular Sisyphus is punished to an eternity pushing a gigantic boulder up to the summit of a hill, coming painstakingly close, only to have it roll back down. Camus used this parable to show the universal human struggle to find meaning in a middling universe. He elaborates that accepting the absurdity of life without giving way to hopelessness is the way to find validity and authenticity. Likewise, in Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel, *Notes from Underground*, the alienation that arises from confronting existential nihilism and the intricacies of human consciousness.

The influence of existential nihilism can also be seen in contemporary literature, such as Chuck Palahniuk's *Fight Club*. Through its disillusioned protagonist, the novel explores the quest for authenticity in a world bereft of meaning and the emptiness of consumer culture. These literary works serve as profound reflections on existential nihilism. This and other such works force individuals to face human existence's inherent hollowness and think through how they might find meaning and importance in a seemingly apathetic universe.

Existential nihilism has philosophical roots in existentialism and nihilism which challenges humans to understand the intrinsic absurdity of existence. Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* is one of the most well-known literary works that grapples with these themes. The protagonist of the story Gregor Samsa awakens one morning only to realize he has been transfigured into a giant insect. Kafka portrays the emptiness and isolation through the character of Gregor's experiences. This symbolizes the human struggle to find purpose and meaning in an illogical and incomprehensible world. The discourse sheds light on the core existential crises faced by humans by portraying the detachment between an individual's societal expectations and personal desires.

Waiting for Godot by Samuel Beckett stands as a survey of existential nihilism on the theatrical stage. It follows the infinite and endless wait of two characters, Estragon and Vladimir, for Godot (another character) who never came. Through their conversations, the

play explores the pointlessness of human endeavours, the lack of definite intention, and the inescapability of death. The characters' dialogues shed light on the human ability to search for meaning in life which often feels useless and futile. *Waiting for Godot* expands the spirit of existential nihilism through its combination of absurdity, dark humour, and study of the human condition.

Existential nihilism also assists as a philosophical lens through which literature scans the densities of the search for meaning, the confrontation with a seemingly indifferent universe and the essence of human existence. Masterpieces like Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* offer readers deep insights into the struggle to find meaning in a world that mostly disregards any logical reason. These works invite readers to envisage the meaning of life, challenge them to face their own existential qualms and help them find ways to navigate the void of existence.

Most of the existentialists surrendered in despair, but some writers like Dostoevsky had the courage to resist. Kafka believes in the completeness of society in its own way. According to him, life is more than logical reasoning. Reason can be a small part of human personality, this notion is attacked by Sartre's ideas on the impersonal narrator who, with the knowledge of the inner workings of people and their scenarios turns accidents in acts of fate. He opined that this concept was a gross misunderstanding of what it means to be human. According to Sartre this very impersonal narrator is a misleading concept further obfuscating reality. This line of thought perpetuates further man's feeling of being alone in the world, which Kafka identified with not only personally but as part of the universal human experience..

Jean-Paul Sartre explains the principle of existence preceding essence in his existentialism:

We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world and defines himself afterwards. If man as the existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything later, and then he will be what he makes of himself Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it. Man simply is. Not that he is simply what he conceives himself after already existing as he wills to be after that leap towards existence. Man is nothing

else but that which he makes of himself this is the first principle of existentialism. (Sartre 28)

All existentialists, both Christian existentialists like Karl Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel, and existential atheists like Martin Heidegger or Jean-Paul Sartre agree on one common principle- "Existence comes before essence" (Maden).

Kafka was a relatively modern author and such described the human condition as seen in our post industrial revolution world which for him was an experience full of guilt, cruel injustice and absurdity, something he explored at length in his works such as *The Metamorphosis*. Gregor Samsa toiled like an insect before the change. He had no leisure time; his only concern was paying off the debt which he had incurred from the chief clerk. His life had turned into a habit and he had no opportunity for artistic expression. After the transformation, his main anxiety was to catch a train and go to his work. When people find out he cannot work he becomes a worthless being for society and a load for the family, so he is locked in a room. Gregor's isolation and absurd life were clear before and after becoming an insect. It is still true that many people feel estranged and absurd in this world. Just working for the sake of working. Some try to find joy in habitual work just like Sisyphus in *The Myth of Sisyphus*; others find no meaning in being in the world, so they take their own lives.

Another remarkable litterateur who made a significant impact on Western intellectualism's modern predicament was the Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky. Dostoevsky was extremely insightful about human nature, and it is a recurring theme throughout his works. Indeed, Nietzsche said that Dostoevsky was "the only psychologist from whom I had something to learn" (Patrick). Parenthetically, Dostoevsky explicitly talks about man's ability to lie to himself in *Brothers Karamazov*:

The man who lies to himself and listens to his own lie comes to such a pass that he cannot distinguish the truth within him, or around him, and so loses all respect for himself and for others. And having no respect he ceases to love, and in order to occupy and distract himself without love he gives way to passions and coarse pleasures, and sinks to bestiality in his vices, all from continual lying to other men and to himself (390)

In this section, I have highlighted some studies using Existentialism as a lens for analysis. In the graduate thesis entitled “Comparative Study of the Aspects of Existentialism in the Short Stories of Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Edgar Allen Poe” that is written by Sharma Satyendra, various aspects of existentialism employed by Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Edgar Allan Poe have been discussed, and also uses Existentialism as a theory to analyse the ultimate question in life, which is about her existence in this world. Similarly, the thesis “Existential Crisis in Franz Kafka" by Rosy Chamling gives us an insight into the themes of alienation and the crisis of being alive by studying the various characters of Kafka.

Existential nihilism can be described as the philosophical view that life has no inherent meaning or worth. In relation to the universe, existential nihilism implies that a single human or even the whole human species is trivial, without aim and unlikely to make a difference in the entirety of existence. According to the view, each individual is a separate being born into the universe, prevented from knowing the why'. The intrinsic meaninglessness of life is mainly examined in the philosophical branch of existentialism, where one can possibly create their own subjective meaning or purpose.

Soul revealing literary thoughts in Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* by Arun Kumar Joshi is a good dissertation that portrays an honest attempt to explore the ways through which Fyodor Dostoevsky has revealed the inner workings of the human soul in his *Crime and Punishment*.

1.1.2 The Human Condition

Existentialism, a philosophical perspective that emerged in the late 19th and 20th centuries, delves deeply into the human condition and the fundamental questions surrounding existence, meaning, and individuality. At its core, existentialism posits that human beings are confronted with life's inherent absurdity and unpredictability. This philosophy emphasizes the individual's freedom to create their own meaning and purpose in a seemingly indifferent universe, while simultaneously acknowledging the weight of responsibility that accompanies such autonomy.

Central to existentialism is the idea that human beings grapple with a profound sense of existential angst. This existential angst arises from the tension between our desire for

meaning and the realization that the universe does not inherently provide us with a predetermined purpose. This condition gives rise to feelings of alienation and isolation, prompting individuals to confront the ultimate question of their place in the world. Existentialist thinkers such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus emphasize the importance of embracing this existentialism as a driving force for self-discovery and authenticity.

In the face of this existential crisis, existentialism underscores the significance of individual choice and responsibility. Existentialists argue that individuals have the power to define their own values and shape their destinies, even in the absence of external guidance or objective meaning. This liberation, however, comes with the burden of making authentic choices and bearing the consequences of those choices. The existentialist perspective challenges individuals to confront the reality of their mortality and live authentically by embracing their freedom, rather than succumbing to societal norms or external pressures.

Existentialism also acknowledges the concept of bad faith wherein individuals evade the responsibility of making genuine choices by conforming to societal expectations or relying on external authorities. This notion highlights the tension between the desire for security and the need to confront the uncertainty of existence. By recognizing and resisting bad faith, individuals can strive for a more authentic and fulfilling life rooted in their values and aspirations.

Existentialism, therefore, offers a profound exploration of the human condition, emphasizing the tension between our desire for meaning and the inherent ambiguity of existence. This philosophy encourages individuals to grapple with existential angst, take ownership of their choices, and strive for authenticity. While existentialism acknowledges life's challenges and uncertainties, it also celebrates the potential for individuals to create their own sense of purpose in a world that may lack inherent meaning. Ultimately, existentialism invites us to confront the complexities of the human experience and find meaning within the boundaries of our own existence.

The human condition encompasses all traits and key events that constitute the essence of human existence, such as birth, growth, feelings, ambitions, struggles, and the inevitability of death. This is a very broad topic that has been and continues to be pondered and examined from various perspectives including those of religion, philosophy, history, art, literature,

anthropology, psychology, and biology. C. Welch, in literary perspectives, describes the human condition as often used in the context of vague subjects, such as the purpose of life or ethical issues.

One of the most vital concepts of literature is that it relates itself to the human condition. Basically, critics of literature usually stamp a writing as literature only if it tries to realize, understand and describe the human condition. Writing that does not fulfil this criterion is mostly regarded as pulp fiction. According to Reference.com, the condition “refers to anything unique about being human, no matter the gender, race or religion of the person”. As humans, we face some common conditions, challenges and miseries. These are irrelevant to our race, religion or social status. The human condition basically serves to explore our collective issues in the similar aspects of our lives, and the general issues with human society as a whole.

So essentially, the human condition deals with all the basic issues of human existence. One of the aspects of literature is to study this human condition, and it may be more successful at this than psychology or philosophy.

Dostoevsky seems to have a penetrating insight into the nature and psychology of human beings. Many writers only have a skin-deep understanding of human emotions. However, Dostoevsky shows how people have a complicated, intertwined system of feelings, which usually keep shifting from one emotion to the next. The concept of depravity is especially highlighted excellently by Dostoevsky. He explores its consequences and shows that it exists because of isolation from humans, and ultimately, from the divine.

The message Kafka conveys about human nature is that unconditional love is possible, though it is uncommon. He discusses the idea that only when we live outside of normal social ties are we able to see what is most valuable in life. *The Metamorphosis* shows how the boundary between humans and non-humans is established. The difference between them on the basis of body is displayed. Before Gregor turned into a bug, he was the core of the family. However, after his change, he was solely estimated by his insect body.

Several literary pieces offer insights into the human experience. A notable example is Shakespeare's reflective monologue "All the world's a stage," which thoughtfully outlines the seven stages of human existence.

1.1.3 Repressive Regimes

In his book, *Totalitarianism*, Mark Michael Curtis said that analysts have used the concept of "totalitarianism to suggest a qualitative difference between three regimes - Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Soviet Union at least until the death of Stalin- and the countless dictatorial systems that have existed throughout history" (2). By repressive regimes, this study aims to talk about the kind of unjust government that physically and psychologically exploited the characters chosen for the study of political existentialism.

Existentialism, a philosophical framework rooted in the exploration of human existence and individual freedom, offers a profound lens through which to understand the dynamics of repressive regimes. These regimes, marked by the systematic curtailment of individual liberties and the concentration of power, directly contrast with existentialism's core principles. The philosophy's emphasis on personal autonomy, authenticity, and the search for meaning becomes especially relevant when examining how individuals navigate the challenges posed by such regimes.

At the heart of existentialism lies the concept of personal freedom and the responsibility that comes with it. Repressive regimes actively suppress this freedom through censorship, surveillance, and persecution, often coercing individuals into conformity. This manipulation of individual agency clashes with existentialism's assertion that individuals possess the power to define their own values and shape their destinies. Under repressive rule, existentialist ideals of living an authentic life become difficult to achieve, as the fear of punishment and the pressure to conform can force individuals to adopt false identities and deny their true selves.

The Kyoto School, philosophical movement, founded by Nishida Kitarō and later developed by Nishitani Keiji, integrates Western existentialism with Eastern thought. Nishida's concept of "absolute nothingness" and Nishitani's exploration of nihilism are central to their existential inquiries (Balogh 98-119). They argue that understanding the self

requires confronting the void and embracing a form of existential authenticity (Balogh 98-119). In the 20th century, Japanese philosophers like Morita Masatake and Yoshimoto Ishin explored the psychological impacts of living under repressive regimes. Their work in psychotherapeutic approaches, such as Morita therapy, aimed to help individuals find personal meaning and resilience in the face of societal pressures (Balogh 98-119).

Existentialism also provides insights into the psychological toll of living under repressive regimes. Existential thinkers like Viktor Frankl argue that finding meaning in suffering is a fundamental human capacity. However, repressive regimes often strip individuals of their ability to find purpose in their experiences, leading to existential despair. The existentialist notion of "existential vacuum" – the sense of emptiness resulting from a lack of meaning – can be exacerbated in such environments, where individuals are denied the freedom to pursue their passions, beliefs, and connections with others.

Moreover, repressive regimes can amplify existentialist concepts such as bad faith. In an attempt to survive or mitigate suffering, individuals may choose to comply with the regime's ideology against their own beliefs and values. This act of self-deception contradicts the existentialist call for authenticity and self-awareness. However, some individuals may still resist this temptation, embracing their inner freedom even when outwardly conforming. This inner resistance aligns with existentialism's emphasis on embracing one's true self despite external pressures.

In conclusion, the intersection of existentialism and repressive regimes highlights the fundamental clash between individual autonomy and authoritarian control. The philosophy's exploration of freedom, authenticity, and meaning underscores the ways in which repressive regimes impede human potential and limit genuine self-expression. Despite these challenges, existentialism also illuminates the enduring human spirit, as individuals may find ways to assert their agency, preserve their authenticity, and seek personal meaning even in the face of oppression.

1.2 Significance of the Study

Since the middle of the nineteenth century, Japanese philosophers have been engaging with Western thought on existentialism and nihilism. Although some important

dialogue between the Kyoto School and western existential philosophy has been developed since then, such work has been largely confined strictly to only religion and politics. Almost no work has been done to attend to the matters of existentialism and nihilism which I believe constitute an integral part of their philosophy. Moreover, using such a cross-cultural approach, this study provides a fresher perspective on existential philosophy and literature itself. Furthermore, by choosing works of writers belonging to different parts of the world: Germany, and Japan, this research will maintain that the universal subject of the human condition has always been relevant and personal to humankind. The research's engagement with contemporary themes like oppressive regimes, existentialism, and the political problems arising from border restriction due to the pandemic also make this research a significant contribution to the literature and contemporary discourse. Lastly, The Kyoto School's philosophy of "absolute nothingness" provides a moral ground that the present world is in dire need of: to transcend both material and immaterial reality to embrace truth, and to consider justice as the path to freedom and peace.

1.3 Limitations of the Study

This study will be delimited only to the selected works of Franz Kafka and the first part of the Japanese film trilogy called *The Human Condition* directed by Masaki Kobayashi. The theoretical lens applied is one of Hannah Arendt and the Kyoto School of Thought. Also, due to this thesis's time and length constraints, the research will solely focus on the areas mentioned in the research questions, while keeping the sample limited to the selected works.

1.4 Organization of the Study

This research will be divided into four chapters. The first chapter will introduce the selected works, and the literary theory will be introduced. Moreover, a Literature Review will be included in the Introduction, in which other related literature will be used as the point of reference to this study as well as to identify any existing knowledge gap in the scholarly work available. Considering the importance of the novels and theories, the study's objectives, questions, and importance will be dispensed. The second chapter will be the Theoretical Framework, in which the conceptual framework the methodology of deploying the conceptual lens will be discussed. The third chapter will be the analysis of the selected

works. The conclusions drawn from this study will be noted in the fourth and the last of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

This research will explore how modern repressive regimes dehumanize the human condition. For this purpose, the standpoint I've chosen is a dialogue between Arendt's political theory and the Kyoto School. To address the theme of existentialist political thought, this study will focus on Arendt's political theory, and for the moral expedition of existentialism the Kyoto School will also be brought into engagement. It does not mean that the two philosophies stand alone. On the contrary, I would like to maintain the point that in the study of cross-cultural literature, a true encounter between cultures and individuals depends on the place and manner of an intercultural dialogue, which is of absolute significance. Although all the affiliates of the Kyoto School have drawn on the philosophies of Western existentialism, their roots remained firm in the Eastern tradition. Kitarō Nishida is considered to be the founding member of the school; although, he never meant to inaugurate The Kyoto School to stand as a separate school of thought.

2.1 Hannah Arendt's Political Thought

The standpoint taken into account while investigating the subject matter (the human condition) is the political theory of Hannah Arendt. In a series of later studies, she outlined a political theory centred on the typology of "labour", "work", and "action" (Arendt 33). She defines labour as meeting basic needs; work as the "activity which is tied to the condition of worldliness"(Arendt 33) ; whereas, "action" is a social activity in a public sphere (33). Arendt considers action or "*vita activa*" as the one that preserves the existential values of humans in any society (33). She regards such political action as the noblest of all activities. For Ardent, political action is not motivated by morality, but by her existential values, which political action aims to fulfill. Thus the human condition becomes deplorable when these existential values are challenged. George Kateb in his article "Existential Values in Arendt's Treatment of Evil and Morality" says:

Let us remember that she says that totalitarian evil destroys "the fact of existence itself" by destroying what is distinctively human about its victims' existence. A crime

against humanity is a crime, above all, against the humanity, the humanness, the human status, of the victims. The crime is absolute: it makes human beings into the semblance of human beings; it is more terrible than the worst immorality. (Kateb 15)

One interesting phrase used by Arendt is “the banality of evil” in her book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. Arendt says that totalitarian evil exists by the active participation of its subjects. Dostoevsky throws some light from the perspective of *Crime and Punishment* which reinforces the same outlook. Kateb writes in his article:

Only persons, then, not reified abstractions, can be held responsible, even when their behavior is free of any self-conscious will to do or allow evil or other wrongs. They are responsible when they go through the motions of their work or just go along. (Kateb 7)

Hannah Arendt looked at totalitarianism as not a form of government that has always been present but as an emerging form established during the 20th century. According to Plato, humans have tried the following forms of government: timocracy, government by the brave, oligarchy which is government by the rich, and democracy, the government by the people (Brown 15). Although most contemporary governments run through a blend between a democracy and an oligarchy, Arendt argues that totalitarianism is an invention of the 20th century. In her book, *The Origin of Totalitarianism*, she discusses two concrete examples of this system by talking about Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia. The characteristics of totalitarianism work in stealthy ways. She claims it “erases classes by seeing everyone belong to the masses” (Arendt 77). Totalitarianism also “seeks to align its efforts towards a supreme, unavoidable law” (Arendt 80). Arendt stressed that totalitarian regimes can only prevail if people accept a grand narrative transcending the face-value understanding of reality (78). She wrote in her book, *The Origin of Totalitarianism*, “ideological thinking” becomes liberated from the reality we discern with our five senses, and it advocates for a ‘more truer’ reality hidden beyond all things we can perceive.” (Arendt 134). She argues that this kind of ideological thinking is more prevalent when the distinction between ‘reality’ and ‘fiction’ is unclear. This is how she explains the rule of Adolf Hitler and fascism, which still prevails in many parts of the world. Arendt emphasized that ideological thinking is contemptuous of the empirical world. It replaces reality with a fictional world that fits the ideology’s narrative.

This leads to a “functioning world of no-sense,” where facts are irrelevant, and only the ideological narrative matters (474).

Arendt noted that ideologies play a crucial role in upholding totalitarian regimes. Totalitarian ideologies, such as Nazism and Stalinism, claim to have discovered absolute laws of nature or history. These ideologies demand absolute loyalty and suppress any form of dissent or critical thinking (474). Arendt’s analysis of Hitler’s regime is central to her understanding of totalitarianism. She observed that Hitler’s ideology mobilized the masses around a simplistic and destructive narrative, leading to the systematic extermination of Jews and other marginalized groups. Arendt noted that Hitler’s antisemitism was not just a social prejudice but a political tool used to consolidate power and justify atrocities (Arendt 474).

In her theory of political action, Hannah Arendt states that loneliness or seclusion in a political sphere amounts to isolation in a social sphere. In totalitarian regimes, it equates to the phenomenon of cancel culture. In such societies, the cancellation of individuals alienates them for breaking unseen political codes. The banishment from such political fronts results in the banishment from social fronts. In totalitarian regimes, subjective reality is preferred over objective truth. The totalitarian governments make people lonely. Hannah Arendt in her book *The Origin of Totalitarianism* says:

What prepares men for totalitarian domination in a non-totalitarian world is the fact that loneliness, once a borderline experience usually suffered in certain marginal social conditions like old age, has become an everyday experience of the ever growing masses of our century (Arendt 474)

This holds to the contemporary world of the 21st century as well. The individual societies of the world make people lonely, which is the gateway to existentialism. Totalitarianism was a significant concern in Arendt's work, especially in her work *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. She examined the rise of totalitarian regimes and the erosion of individuality and political freedom under such systems. Arendt explored the mechanisms through which totalitarian ideologies manipulate and control individuals, suppressing political agency and dissent.

Hannah Arendt believes totalitarianism is “lawfulness without legality” (402). While addressing the conditions that make totalitarianism possible and pose a threat to people’s existential values in the sphere of “action”, she mentioned that such systems supplant “legality” with either laws of history or laws of nature (402). For instance, the ideology that Aryans were superior led to mass murder. Arendt argues that the masses follow such ideologies as totalitarianism because they are swept along a force outside of them. She criticized the ideologies of Karl Marx and Darwin due to their hierarchical approach. The concept of survival of the fittest as an unchangeable law of nature also fuels totalitarianism. She says, “terror is the essence of totalitarianism” (465). Terror makes humans submit, and terror makes humans think that they are not free to act. According to Arendt, action is the third and highest level of *vita activa*. Since thinking is a major component of action, according to Arendt, totalitarianism subjugates the masses by removing the distinction between fiction and reality (466).

Arendt also explored the concept of public space and the importance of political participation in this domain. She argued that meaningful political life occurs in the public jurisdiction, where citizens come together to engage in dialogue, debate, and decision-making. Public space, for Arendt, is where people assert their distinct identities and engage with others to shape the course of political affairs (468).

Hannah Arendt's philosophical perspective is distinct from traditional existentialism despite sharing some common themes. While existentialism, particularly as developed by thinkers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, centers on individual subjectivity, freedom, and the struggle to find meaning in a seemingly indifferent universe, Arendt's approach focuses on human existence's public and political aspects. She argues that existential values of humans are challenged by repressive regimes when the freedom to exercise the political action is taken away. In “Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil”, Arendt says that the core of totalitarian rule, and maybe of any bureaucracy, is to turn men into mere officials and “cogs” and parts of the administrative system, and thereby strip them of their humanity (287). The present form of capitalism in the modern world has reduced the status of human life to functionaries and cogs as well. Arendt believes that totalitarianism as an ideology and a part of the human condition has manifested itself as an implicit reality of the

20th century. Arendt assumes that the moral agent is always the person who perpetuates it, regardless of whether the agent acts as a private person or a public official, or whether the agent considers himself a mere cog (Arendt 31), a follower, or a dutiful but indifferent collaborator. In *“Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil”*, Arendt says, “the trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that the many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal” (252). This stance is applicable to the contemporary times as many artificial things such as the products of capitalism have become a norm.

Overall, Hannah Arendt's political theory is characterized by its focus on the importance of political participation, the significance of public discourse, and the exploration of the human condition within the realm of politics. Her work continues to influence contemporary discussions on democracy, freedom, power, and the nature of political existence.

2.2 The Kyoto School of Thought

Nishida challenged the ethnocentric views of both Western and Japanese thinkers in the 20th century. He wrote that Westerners have always assumed that their culture is the most superior and the only way for human civilization to progress. Therefore, they expected that Easterners and other peoples would eventually adopt their culture as they advanced (Nishida 400). He regrets that even some Japanese share this view. But he disagrees, saying that “the East [has a culture] that is fundamentally different” (Nishida 233). Nishida claims that neither the West nor the East can absorb this difference in their development. He believes that humanity has a common origin (which he calls, borrowing a term from Goethe, an “ur-culture” of multiple possibilities, but its growth is not about uniformity, but diversity. Nishida envisions globalization as many branches of the same tree that complement each other, based on their common roots and their distinct features (Nishida 402).

The two selected works, *The Penal Colony* and the first volume of the Japanese film trilogy, “The Human Condition: No Greater Love”, reflect the human condition's misery in the face of an oppressive and authoritarian modern state. Such a condition encloses an existential nihilism. The theme of existentialism is central to the whole discussion. Although

in Western philosophy, Jean-Paul Sartre made large contributions in this specific field, I will analyze it from a different and rather much inexplicable perspective. Sartre believes that “existence precedes essence” which means that an individual is free to assign meaning to life (Maden). Existentialism has originated from nihilism, which according to Nietzsche is the idea that we cannot escape the fact that life is meaningless and worthless – we have to face it, even if it is terrifying and lonely. Existentialism is a method to cope with nihilism. An existentialist has to be a nihilist. The existential nihilism, in this light, can be defined as the philosophical view that life has no inherent meaning or worth. It implies that humans, as individuals or as a whole, are insignificant, purposeless, and unable to alter the course of existence. The theory holds that each person is a lonely entity that enters the universe without knowing the reason. The philosophical branch of existentialism examines the intrinsic absurdity of life and the possibility of creating one’s own subjective meaning or purpose. This denotes that nihilism is a fundamental condition of existence. Existential nihilism subsists because one merely exists as opposed to moral, epistemological, and cosmic nihilism. This ontological take on nihilism has always been a major focus of Western philosophy.

However, that ontological view is the one that basically separates Eastern philosophy from Western philosophy. The philosophy of the Kyoto School is of “absolute nothingness”. While the Western philosophy focuses on the question of “being”, and what is it like to “be” or “what is being”, The Kyoto School poses the question, “what is nothingness?” (Nishida 221). For example, Nishida and his followers critically engage with the Western ontology to create a “logic of nothingness” or an Eastern meontology. They try to integrate an Eastern “logic of heart-mind” with a Western “logic of things” (220). Nishida, the founder of the school, uses the term “transcendental subjectivity of consciousness” or “heart-mind” to investigate both subjective and objective aspects of reality (absolute nothingness) (220). Such a perspective provides more scope for the analysis of existential nihilism that presents itself as an integral part of the selected works (Nishida 222). For instance, while Arendt maintains that such “thoughtlessness” on the parts of its subjects aids in the detriment of the human condition, The Kyoto School encourages overcoming nihilism through the transcendence of nihilism (John 220). According to Nishida, “absolute nothingness” is a state of “self-

awareness” as opposed to the “thoughtlessness” of the totalitarian (oppressive state) subject (John 221).

The Kyoto School of Thought synthesized Western philosophical ideas, particularly those of existentialism, phenomenology, and German Idealism, with traditional Japanese thought and spirituality. The school was centred around Kyoto University and had a profound influence on Japanese intellectual and cultural discourse. The Kyoto School engaged with existentialist thought, particularly during times of crisis such as World War II. Tanabe Hajime, for instance, connected existentialist ideas of dread and anxiety with the experiences of contemporary Japan (Davis 7). Keiji Nishitani talks about the human condition when he says, "We are 'thrown' into this world, into the midst of beings which are beyond our control” (Nishitani 23). Such helplessness in front of both man-made and natural conditions paves ways for existentialism.

While the European philosophy of existentialism underwent deconstruction and even passed through what Heidegger called the end of philosophy, the insights that harbored in 20th-century Eastern traditions needed to be transformed into philosophical principles first before they could contribute to world philosophy. The key ideas of Nishida, such as "place", "pure existence", and "contradictory self-identity", are, in fact, traditional Eastern insights transformed into philosophical principles (Goto-Jones et al. 100). These principles complement Arendt's political theory of action and alienation by totalitarian regimes. Arendt's concept of the “banality of evil” in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* highlights how ordinary individuals can commit atrocities by adhering to totalitarian norms without critical thought. She emphasizes the need for individuals to think critically and act authentically (Arendt 287). Similarly, The Kyoto School also emphasizes authenticity and self-realization. Nishida's philosophy of “absolute nothingness” encourages individuals to transcend egoistic desires and realize their true self in harmony with the world (Balogh 98-119).

The core matter of the subject when it comes to formulating a cross-examination between Eastern and Western thinking is that of "nothingness", "being", and "being and nothingness" (Goto-Jones et al. 20). Certainly, it will be oversimplifying to categorize the East as a philosophy of nothingness and the West as a philosophy of being. One distinction that marks a significant difference is that in the Western philosophy, nothingness is

understood through the negation of being as non-being, and is ultimately based on being. By contrast, Nishida and Nishitani argue that nothingness (mu) is not only non-being (hi-u) as the negation of being (u), but also contains a meaning that goes far beyond this (Goto-Jones et al. 18). This can be seen as a transcendental ontological preeminence of being. Ethically, Nishida saw the realization of one's true nature as a transformative process that leads to a more harmonious relationship with others and the world.

One notable aspect of Nishitani's thought is his concern with the impact of Western modernity and its emphasis on rationality, technology, and individualism. He saw these trends as contributing to a sense of alienation and disconnection, much like the alienation pointed out by Arendt that totalitarian governments forage on. The solution to the existential condition is a political action that provides a sense of solidarity. This theoretical framework unfolds a fusion of Arendt's and The Kyoto School's philosophy to treat the subject of existentialism presented in the selected works that contribute to the expansion of the human condition.

It should be clarified that both theories are interconnected. The concept of nothingness has been proposed not only by Nietzsche and Heidegger but also by Tanabe, who undoubtedly had Heidegger's lecture, which he delivered in 1929, "What is Metaphysics?" in his mind when writing the following: "All science needs to take some entity or other as its object of study. The point of contact is always in being, not in nothing" (Heisig 121). However, Nishitani also detects traces of an ontological bias, where a sort of "relative nothingness" is either a mere denial of or a veil for being (Heisig 15). Nishitani finally decides that Nietzsche only managed to convey a "perspective of relative absolute nothingness"; and he also points out that in Heidegger, "signs of the depiction of nothingness as a 'thing' that is nothingness persist" (Heisig 66). In the preface to his book, *From That Which Acts to That Which Sees*, published in 1962, considered the beginning of "Nishidan Philosophy," the author writes programmatic and famous closing lines:

However, does there not lie hidden at the base of our Eastern culture, preserved and passed down by our ancestors for several thousand years, something which sees the form of the formless and hears the voice of the voiceless? (Heisig 29).

Mahāyāna Buddhism uses the term *sūnyatā* (*kū* in Japanese) to denote emptiness, meaning that all things arise through “dependent co-origination” (*pratītyasamutpāda* in Sanskrit and *engi* in Japanese) and therefore have no independent, considerable self-nature or “own-being” (Goto-Jones et al. 31). This idea is related to the core Buddhist doctrine of “no-self” or “non-ego,” which states that all beings, including the ego, are interrelated and impermanent (Goto-Jones et al. 18). The concept of *sūnyatā* also implies the freedom from all attachments to beings and the avoidance of any solidification or deliberate appropriation of them. These attachments often originate from the main attachment to the constructed ego, which tries to own and is unknowingly owned by its solidification of beings (Nakamura 278). Mahāyāna stresses a “great negation” of a solidified misinterpretation of being and a “great affirmation” of a non-solidified interpretation of being, leading to *nirvāna*. (Nakamura 150). *Nirvāna* is not a nihilistic annihilation or a departure from the phenomenal world (*samsāra*), but rather an enlightened mode of being-in-the-world here and now (Garfield 332). East Asian forms of Mahāyāna Buddhism put more emphasis on the radical confirmation of the phenomenal world, expressed in positive terms such as “true emptiness, marvelous being.”

The Kyoto School advocates for the comprehension of the idea of absolute nothingness not as nihilistic nothingness or about being and non-being (Nishimura 22). Instead, it serves as a response to existentialism and the human condition and is a more enlightened manner of being-in-the-world (Heisig 58).

2.3 Relevance of the Theories to this Research:

This study's main purpose is to analyze the menace posed to existential values of humans by repressive governments. For this purpose, two theories have been taken into consideration. The importance of both theories is significant, and they overlap back and forth. The film *The Human Condition: No Greater Love* is a great production of Japanese cinema and is also an appropriate depiction of a repressive regime stripping people of their fundamental human rights.

Kaji's journey in *The Human Condition* films could be interpreted through an existential lens as he grapples with moral dilemmas, confronts his own limitations, and strives to maintain his humanity amidst a dehumanizing environment. His struggle to remain

true to his values in the face of societal pressure and the horrors of war is seen as an exploration of existential themes related to individual agency and authenticity. However, Nishida Kitaro talks about the absolute nothingness as a perspective through which paradigm could be changed. The film ends with Kaji articulating, "I'm a monster, but I'm going to stay alive!" (3:29:45–3:32:3). Hannah Arendt's idea of the banality of evil is a central idea that she introduced in her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. Arendt's concept of the banality of evil raises important questions about individual responsibility, moral judgment, and the mechanisms through which ordinary people can become complicit in acts of great cruelty. It challenges the conventional understanding of evil as a characteristic of monstrous individuals. It prompts us to consider the capacity for evil within ordinary individuals who participate in morally reprehensible actions.

"The Penal Colony" is a short story written by Franz Kafka. It's a work that explores themes of justice, punishment, and the nature of human existence in a highly allegorical and symbolic manner. The story can be seen as an allegory of absurdity and alienation, both key concepts in existentialism. The absurdity arises from the extreme and senseless nature of the execution process, highlighting the incomprehensible nature of human suffering. The condemned prisoner's alienation from his body and the world reflects existentialist concerns about the individual's estrangement from their existence.

The condemned prisoner's inability to comprehend the crime for which he is being executed and the officer's adherence to the machine's rituals point to the tension between the individual's perspective and societal norms. This reflects existentialism's focus on the conflict between personal authenticity and social conformity. Hannah Arendt's writings touch on the theme of social conformity, particularly in the context of political and moral considerations. She talks about how individuals interact with society, institutions, and the norms that govern human behavior in her political theory which will be further analyzed in this research.

This research analyzes how the Western being and Eastern no-self explores the theme of the human condition when subjected to ruthless modern state machinations. This is achieved by analyzing the selected works in light of Arendt's political theory and the philosophy of The Kyoto School.

2.4 Research Methodology

This research applies a mixed-method approach involving content analysis and hermeneutics, and will therefore, be qualitative in nature. According to the SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. [It] consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. This implies that qualitative researchers' studies things in their real settings, making sense of or interpreting ideas or principles in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (Denzin & Lincoln 43)

The Canadian Oxford Dictionary defines methodology as “a body of methods” and as “the branch of knowledge that deals with method” (Barber 912). The qualitative research literature also allows for some latitude. Laverly argued that methodology, unlike a prescriptive method, is a “creative approach to understanding” (16) that can draw on various approaches. By loosening the methodological constraints, these approaches enable alternative forms of inquiry that challenge the scientific paradigm and, in particular, the hegemony of philosophical hermeneutics. In the field of hermeneutics, it's beneficial to preserve these uncertainties. Derrida, when discussing the boundary between animals and humans, stated that his intention was not to erase this boundary. Instead, he aimed to expand its representations, make it more complex, densify it, disrupt its linearity, fold it, and divide it, all with the goal of enhancing and multiplying it (29). The purpose of this study, then, is not to elide or ignore the limits of method/ methodology or methodology/process, but rather to be attentive to such boundaries, while pursuing the path of philosophical hermeneutics qua interpretative study. Hermeneutics plays a significant role in literary analysis. Scholars use hermeneutical concepts and theories as a strategy for interpretive research that emphasizes the meanings of texts, culture, and art. The Hermeneutic Content Analysis is a method that combines Hermeneutic and Qualitative Content Analysis to analyze, interpret and understand a text in a circular movement. The Hermeneutic approach is the art of interpreting and understanding a text from both subjective and objective perspectives. The Qualitative Content Analysis is a technique that systematically describes the meaning of qualitative data by using codes and categories, and it involves both description and interpretation of the data.

Bergman (4) defines the Hermeneutic Content Analysis as a mixed method that consists of both Hermeneutic and Qualitative Content Analysis. Thus, the Hermeneutic Content Analysis is a method that integrates two techniques and applies them through systematization, coding, categorization, interpretation, understanding and reflection.

For the deployment of the theoretical framework delineated above, I have selected two literary texts as case studies. One is a visual text based on a Japanese work of literary fiction; “The Human Condition: No Greater Love” is the first volume of the film trilogy directed by Masaki Kobayashi. The film follows the life of Kaji, a Japanese pacifist and socialist, as he tries to survive in the totalitarian and oppressive world of World War II-era Japan. This research will use the first part of the trilogy called “No Greater Love” for the analysis. The second text is from the works of Franz Kafka, and the focus will be on his short story, “The Penal Colony”. I have selected this particular text keeping in mind the alignment of the historical time period with the other text, as well as the thematic parallels between the two texts. Kafka’s short story will also serve to provide a more Western or European paradigm which I will juxtapose with the non-Western/ eastern or Japanese paradigm of the human condition.

In order to interpret the selected film “The Human Condition: No Greater Love”, Hermeneutic Content Analysis will provide an interpretive lens in order to study the character development of Kaji and supporting characters throughout the film while keeping historic, subjective, political, and cultural perspective in mind. Furthermore, Qualitative Content Analysis will be implied to a Franz Kafka’s “The Penal Colony”.

CHAPTER THREE

Western Being and Eastern No-self: A journey of the men worlds apart

The human condition has been defined as an existential state that arises from the perpetual perpetuation of violence at the hands of modern states. When human beings are stripped of their basic human rights in war and in the name of wars, existentialism steers ways to a human condition so inhumane that it is of great importance to analyze the underlying root causes. In this study, two texts have been taken into consideration, which contain multiple proceedings where those in power have disseminated violence and utmost injustice to those held helplessly captive.

Firstly, I will aim to draw comparisons between *Kaji* and the *Condemned Man* enabling the divergences and convergences among those texts to come forth. Moreover, I will discuss the film called *The Human Condition*, which is known for its exploration of human morality, ethics, and the struggles of individuals against the conditions of war and social commotion alongside Kafka's *The Penal Colony* I'll analyze them under the philosophies of Hannah Arendt and The Kyoto School of Thought. This will be done by examining the theme of the human condition under the philosophies of Kitaro, Nishida, and Keiji Nishitani, whose philosophies constituted an integral part of The Kyoto School.

The "Human Condition" trilogy is considered a landmark in Japanese cinema. It is known for its powerful depiction of the human condition and its exploration of the moral complexities of war and human behavior. It is a tormenting and stimulating cinematic experience that provides insight into the human condition during times of conflict. The three films in the trilogy are: "No Greater Love" (1959), "Road to Eternity" (1959), and "A Soldier's Prayer" (1961). Due to time limitations, this research will only analyze the first film called "No Greater Love". Throughout the trilogy, *Kaji* grapples with moral dilemmas, the struggle to maintain his principles in the face of extreme circumstances, and the atrocities committed by both sides. The films delve into themes of idealism, dehumanization, the corrupting influence of power, and the complex interplay between individual ethics and societal pressures.

"No Greater Love" (Japanese: "Ningen no Joken I") is the first film in the "The Human Condition" trilogy directed by Masaki Kobayashi, released in 1959. The film is set during World War II. It tells the story of Kaji, a Japanese pacifist and humanist, as he faces the challenges and moral dilemmas of working in a labor camp in Manchuria (northeastern China).

The film opens with Kaji, a young idealistic Japanese man, working as a supervisor in a labor camp in Manchuria. The Japanese military manages the camp, and the prisoners are Chinese civilians who are subjected to brutal treatment, forced labor, and dehumanization. Kaji is determined to treat the prisoners with compassion and to ensure their well-being, which brings him into conflict with the camp's repressive regimes.

3.1 Existentialism and the Condemned Men:

Existentialism often contemplates the significance of mortality and the reality of death. In a wartime setting, the films confront the fragility of human life and the impact of death on individuals and society. The theme of existentialism exposes itself again and again in different scenarios. For instance, in the film, *The Human Condition*, after being captured, Kaji says in a meeting with labor camp attendees, "mistreating the men won't yield good results" (20:18). Similarly, a Japanese soldier mercilessly beating a Chinese prisoner was interrupted by Kaji. On inquiring about the reason behind such brutality, he says, "the dog refused to work" (25:40). Another occurrence when the existence of humans was called into question was when Mr. Kawashime had an argument with Kaji. He says, "What's wrong with slapping a cheek or two if it keeps the ore coming out and helps the war effort? What's more important: the ore or the workers?" (27:30). To this question, Kaji replies, "I do not think in those terms. I do not compare men with ore" (27:47). When Kaji's internal character and beliefs remain unchanged in face of death, it implies that a totalitarian system has failed to normalize evil (banality of evil). The protagonist has surpassed the being; the protagonist is not being manipulated by the state machinations. Such selflessness and self-awareness is the open rebellion against a repressive regime.

Existentialism also delves into the profound concept of existential pessimism or nihilism, which arises from the confrontation with the inherent absurdity, ambiguity, and

finitude of human existence. Such pessimism stems from the dissonance between the desire for stable meaning and the absence of absolute truths, engendering a profound sense of alienation and anxiety. When existentialism arises from the confrontation of the absurd authority, just like the one depicted in the film in the form of the Japanese labor camp, existentialism can be traced back to its origins. At this point, it can be maintained that individuals, just like Kaji and the Condemned Man, no matter of their demographics, hold the power to transcend the individual ego-self and create harmony and hope for a better world.

This research analyses the existential incidents giving rise to existential the human condition by using the lens of The Kyoto School, mainly revealing the philosophies of Nishida Kitarō and Nishitani Keiji. Nishitani made a statement about Tanabe and Nishida, saying that their philosophies have a unique and shared foundation that distinguishes them from conventional Western philosophy: the concept of absolute nothingness (11). It is evident that the notion of absolute nothingness emerged from Eastern spirituality. However, the fact that it has also been established as a basis for philosophical thinking signifies a novel development that is almost unparalleled in the annals of Western philosophy (Nishitani 161).

The Human Condition begins with *No Greater Love* (1959), in which protagonist Kaji avoids military service as a conscientious objector during Japan's involvement in the Second World War by taking an assignment as assistant overseer of Chinese prisoners of war in a forced labor camp. Torn between obedience to his superiors and his pacifistic, socialistic, and humanistic principles, Kaji tries to influence the operation by standing up for the prisoners against brutal conditions and cruel treatment, but is struck down by bureaucratic disdain and the camp politics at nearly every turn.

Kaji, after attempting to free the labor camp from the dehumanization of its subjects in vain, says that "There's no real way of knowing what's going on. But if you work at it, keep trying, you may be able to glimpse something. At least, that's what I believe" (2:22). We can analyze this quote from both the Western conceptualization of existentialism or 'being' and from the Eastern conceptualization of nothingness or no-being. The phrase "There's no real way of knowing what's going on" highlights the existentialist notion of the fundamental uncertainty of existence. The statement "But if you work at it, keep trying, you may be able to glimpse something" reflects the existentialist emphasis on individual agency.

Existentialism encourages individuals to take responsibility for their lives and create meaning. In a world where objective truths are elusive, existentialists believe that humans can still shape their experiences through conscious effort and determination. Moreover, when Kaji says, “you may be able to glimpse something,” it captures the existentialist pursuit of meaning and significance. While existentialists acknowledge the inherent ambiguity of existence, they also believe that individuals can have fleeting moments of insight or understanding. These moments, or glimpses can provide a sense of purpose and direction amidst the broader uncertainty. Lastly, the lines, “At least, that's what I believe,” underscores the subjectivity of existentialist viewpoints. Existentialism often celebrates individual beliefs and perspectives, recognizing that meaning is a deeply personal and subjective experience. This aligns with the existentialist rejection of universal truths or dogmas.

However, Nishitani talks about the idea of absolute nothingness, a negation of self, or simply a transcendence of existentialism or the human condition itself (22). It then talks about a solution to such a condition and hence offers a philosophy that can end this constant condition in which humans find themselves too often. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, “śūnyatā” primarily signifies that all entities arise through “interdependent origination” (Davis 20). Consequently, they are “void” of any independent, considerable self-essence or “own-being” (referred to as “svabhāva” in Sanskrit) (Davis 23). Absolute nothingness is a term used by these philosophers to describe a foundational, non-dualistic, and indeterminate reality that goes beyond conventional concepts of existence and non-existence. It is a concept that merges elements of Buddhist thought, particularly Zen Buddhism, with Western philosophical ideas. The concept of absolute nothingness has existential implications. It challenges conventional notions of self and reality, which can lead to a sense of liberation and expansiveness. Embracing this concept may lead to a profounder understanding of existence's impermanent and ever-changing nature.

The phrase mentioned earlier by the protagonist of the film, *The Human Condition*, when looked at from Nishitani’s concept of “absolute nothingness,” provides a vaster approach to the dilemma of the human condition. His words reverberate the idea that conventional modes of knowledge and understanding might not grasp the true nature of reality. In the Kyoto School's thought, conventional dualistic thinking often restricts us from

apprehending deeper truths about existence. When Kaji says, "But if you work at it, keep trying, you may be able to glimpse something" (2:22), the emphasis on effort and persistent inquiry aligns with the Kyoto School's emphasis on self-awareness and introspection. The idea is that through continuous self-examination and meditative practice, one may begin to transcend ordinary perception and approach a more profound understanding of reality. Finally, his words, "At least, that's what I believe" (2:22), acknowledge personal belief, which is significant in the context of the Kyoto School's philosophy. While striving for a direct experience of absolute nothingness, these philosophers recognized that such an experience might not be communicated directly through language or conventional concepts. Instead, belief and personal insight play a role in approaching this understanding.

In the film, Kaji expresses the fleeting futility of life when he says, "We're all envoys. We're envoys with only one life to fulfill our mission. Whether we complete it or not, in the end, we're nothing more than human" (2:54). These words resonate with the Kyoto School's emphasis on the uniqueness and individuality of human existence. In the philosophy of Nishida Kitaro and his contemporaries, each individual is seen as a unique expression of reality, and life is viewed as a journey with a distinct purpose or mission. When he says, "in the end, we're nothing but humans" (2:55), it reflects the humility inherent in the Kyoto School's approach. Despite the emphasis on individual uniqueness and the pursuit of one's mission, the philosophy also recognizes the fundamental humanity that binds all individuals together. This echoes the concept of absolute nothingness as it emphasizes the interconnectedness of all things while acknowledging the limitations of individual perspectives. The lines provided touch on this idea by highlighting both individuality (as envoys with unique missions) and universality (as fundamentally human). This duality reflects the tension between particularity and universality that the Kyoto School explores. For instance, Kaji's realization that he's only a human at the end depicts his acceptance of emptiness and limit of being a human. The Kyoto School also sees "absolute nothingness" as the ultimate reality underlying everything. It's not just emptiness but a profound, dynamic emptiness that transcends ordinary existence, where all distinctions and dualities merge into a single, unified reality. We see that Kaji who was an idealist is eventually transformed into a person transcends the grand narratives of morality that Arendt argues a totalitarian

government wish to uphold. He sees and realizes his potential in front of an unjust system, but that does not he became a tyrant like the rest. The Kyoto School argues that behind the subjective reality of morality lies a state of nothingness that has the power to change the world. Kaji's morality shifts from a hopeful idealism to a more disillusioned realism. Initially driven by a belief in ethical integrity and reform, he becomes increasingly aware of the harsh realities and systemic corruption surrounding him. This realization forces him to confront the limitations of his ideals in a world that often seems indifferent to moral principles. The Kyoto School encourages the acceptance of reality and only then a transcendence of it. However, we see that Kaji is sent off to the war and he accepted his fate by the end of the film, but we see a progression from a state of "being" to "no-being" (Davis 22).

Hannah Arendt emphasized the uniqueness of individuals and the importance of personal responsibility. The idea of being "envoys" aligns with her emphasis on each person's distinct identity and the potential to contribute meaningfully to the world. Arendt's take on existentialism encourages individuals to define themselves through their actions and interactions with the world, which resonates with the concept of fulfilling a mission. The latter part of Kaji's statement (whether we complete it or not, in the end, we're nothing more than human) resonances Arendt's exploration of the human condition. She discussed the inherent limitations of human existence, emphasizing mortality and the finitude of life. The phrase "nothing more than human" reflects Arendt's view that individuals are bound by their human nature while also possessing the capacity to transcend their limitations through meaningful action and engagement with the world. Arendt believed that the realm of human affairs is where individuals can realize their potential and make a meaningful impact. The notion of being "envoys" suggests a sense of purpose and responsibility to act and contribute to the world, which aligns with Arendt's idea of the public realm as a space for human interaction and meaningful deeds. Shakespeare's famous quote from Hamlet talks about the same agenda of such an existential point when he says, "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players. They have their exits and their entrances, and one man in his time plays many parts" (23-24).

Kaji, after being completely disheartened towards the end of the film's first part, *The Human Condition*, says, "words can't change the world. Only actions can" (3:15). Hannah

Arendt's take on existentialism places a strong emphasis on the significance of human action. She believed that action is a fundamental way through which individuals engage with the world, express their unique identities, and contribute to the human condition. The assertion that "only actions can change the world" aligns with Arendt's belief in the transformative power of intentional human behavior. Moreover, Arendt's philosophy highlights the importance of the public realm, where individuals come together to engage in political and social matters. Actions performed in the public sphere have the potential to influence and shape the course of events. These lines imply that mere words, such as rhetoric, are insufficient to bring about meaningful change; the actions taken within the context of the public sphere hold the true potential for transformation. Nonetheless, we observed that the totalitarian regimes play a crucial role in not allowing people to perform such actions with liberty and freedom. No matter how hopeful Kaji is, he is not capable to express his ideology because of the limitations posed by the Japanese government.

Franz Kafka's *The Penal Colony* is a seminal work of 20th-century literature that engages with profound philosophical and moral inquiries. The narrative unfolds through the eyes of an unnamed European explorer who embarks on a visit to an isolated tropical island, where an intricate and archaic penal system is in operation. This system, presided over by a zealous officer, employs an elaborate execution apparatus to administer justice.

The officer contends that the machine embodies the essence of justice, symbolizing retribution and redemption within the colony's legal framework. This apparatus subjects condemned individuals to a prolonged and macabre ordeal, inscribing the details of their crimes onto their flesh over the course of a harrowing twelve-hour process, culminating in their demise. The narrative's focal point revolves around the explorer's moral consternation and intellectual disquietude in response to the penal colony's punitive mechanisms. He is perturbed by the machine's horrific cruelty and the purported ideals it represents, particularly as such practices have been largely abandoned by more enlightened legal systems in Europe.

In the story's climax, the machine malfunctions during a demonstration, causing a prisoner's sudden and painful death. The officer's belief in the machine's perfection is shattered as a result, leaving him in a state of deep despair. Ultimately, the explorer departs from the island profoundly unsettled by the entire experience. Kafka's narrative serves as a

trenchant critique of the inherent barbarity and inhumanity that can manifest within rigid and merciless legal systems, while simultaneously prompting profound introspection regarding the complexities of justice, punishment, existentialism, and the moral ramifications of institutionalized violence.

Franz Kafka's "The Penal Colony" can be analyzed through an existentialist lens, as it touches upon several existential themes and raises questions about the human condition. Existentialism often grapples with the idea that life can be absurd and meaningless. In the "Penal Colony," the elaborate and cruel punishment apparatus used in the penal colony, which raises the sentence on the condemned person's body until they die, can be seen as an absurd and senseless form of punishment. The story underscores the absurdity of suffering and death. For instance, when the Officer says, "This process is no secret. It is laid down in the law" (Kafka 2), and "He was not happy about it, but that is the way things are here" (Kafka 2), it reflects the absurdity and cruelty of the execution process, where the gruesome procedure is presented as a matter of fact, emphasizing the senseless and arbitrary nature of the colony's justice system.

Existentialism frequently examines the individual's isolation and alienation. The condemned man in Kafka's story is isolated from society and any meaningful communication or understanding of his fate. This isolation is a common theme in existentialist literature, where characters often feel disconnected from the world around them. When he says, "The explorer, standing in front of the grave, was left quite alone" (Kafka 18), and "He felt it as a humiliation that this stranger should scrutinize his beard" (Kafka 8), it conveys the explorer's sense of isolation and alienation on the island, where he is an outsider and feels disconnected from the colony's practices and inhabitants.

Existentialism by its virtue encourages individuals to question authority and societal norms. Existentialism can be deemed as the questioning of life in itself. The officer in the story represents the authoritarian figure who unquestioningly adheres to the established system of punishment. On the other hand, the explorer questions the moral and ethical implications of the punishment apparatus, reflecting the existentialist theme of individual moral agency. For example, the officer says, "It is not necessary that you hear the sentence. No one will ever hear it. But it is in your own interest, I notify you that the sentence is known

to the Commandant and to me. That should be enough for you” (Kafka 11). This statement reflects the authoritarian nature of the Officer and the lack of transparency in the judicial process. It suggests that questioning authority is discouraged and the sentence is handed down without being questioned.

Moreover, existentialism places a strong emphasis on individual freedom and choice. The condemned man is ultimately given the choice to accept his punishment or not, highlighting the theme of the human condition in the face of an unjust government. "He was a splendid man, in the full bloom of his years, his uniform taut and gleaming, as if his office had been polished along with his body” (Kafka 3). - This description of the condemned man highlights the stark contrast between his physical appearance and his lack of control over his fate.

Existentialism often confronts the inevitability of death and encourages individuals to grapple with their mortality. The story's focus on the gruesome execution method and the condemned man's acceptance or rejection of it forces readers to consider the existential question of how one faces death. For instance, "It's a peculiar apparatus," said the Officer to the Traveler, gazing with a certain admiration at the device with which he was, of course, thoroughly familiar” (Kafka 3). This quote introduces the intricate execution apparatus, symbolizing death and suffering in the story. It raises existential questions about the nature of life and death. In fact, Kafka centered the plot on the planned execution of the Condemned Man who is set up for the sentence without a trial. Kafka's story delves into the existential aspects of death. The arbitrary and senseless nature of the execution reflects the broader absurdity of human existence and the inevitability of death. The story suggests that death, as administered by the penal colony, is a meaningless and absurd process, mirroring the absurdity of life itself.

Existentialism explores the search for meaning and purpose in a seemingly indifferent world. The story raises questions about the purpose of the penal colony and the significance of such a punishment system in the grander scheme of things. For example, when the Officer says, "This trial, this execution, and the process of the execution are the colony's secrets” (Kafka 8), it alludes to the lack of inherent meaning and clarity in the practices of the colony, emphasizing the obscurity and secrecy surrounding the execution process.

The narrative's premise, centered on an incongruous and elaborate punitive apparatus, functions as a metaphorical vehicle for the examination of existential absurdity. The inhumane and senseless nature of the punishment method underscores the arbitrariness and meaninglessness of suffering and death in the human experience. This serves as a quintessential existentialist motif, resonating with the philosophy's inquiry into the irrationality and absurdity of life. The Traveler's search for meaning and understanding in the face of a cruel and absurd system resonates with the human quest for purpose and understanding in a world that can seem indifferent or senseless.

Franz Kafka's short story "In the Penal Colony" provides a fertile ground for the exploration of existentialist themes within the context of the human condition. In this narrative, Kafka engages with existentialism's core tenets by portraying the absurdity of existence, the isolation of the individual, the questioning of authority and societal norms, the exercise of personal agency, the confrontation with mortality, and the perpetual search for meaning and purpose.

3.2 Repressive Regimes and the Last of the Human Freedoms:

Existentialism in the Western tradition is a philosophical movement that profoundly delves into the concepts of self and being. Central to this philosophical approach is the subjective experience of the individual, their freedom, and the pursuit of meaning within the context of their existence. The subjective experience of one's existence is the starting point of existentialism, which prompts individuals to face the reality of their existence, their thoughts, emotions, and the choices they make. This emphasis on subjectivity underlines the crucial role of the self in existential thought.

Ontology, the first branch of Western philosophy, delves into the essence of existence and seeks to answer the question of "being qua being" (Davis 17). The utmost universal form of "being-ness" or the "highest being" is often used to explain the answer to this question (Davis 17). Aristotle posited that the primary category of being is "substance," which encompasses the particular entity (such as Socrates) and the universal concept that defines it (such as a human being) (Kate 89). Additionally, he believed that the "unmoved mover" was the highest being (Kate 211). The influence of Greek ontology can be seen in the Christian

theological tradition, which regarded God as the highest being. This, in turn, gave rise to the Western philosophical tradition's fundamental inquiry: "What is being?" This question forms the basis of the onto-theological norm of the West.

When examining *The Human Condition* movie through the viewpoint of Western existentialism, it's crucial to remember the concept of "existence before essence" or "being" (Davis 17). This indicates that individuals exist first and then define their identity and essence through their decisions and actions. There is no predetermined human nature or essence. For instance, when Kaji tells his wife Michiko, "No man can escape the destiny that he himself has wrought" (3:01), he emphasizes that existence takes priority over destiny. Humans create their own destiny, whether it be good or bad, cruel or compassionate. In another instance, Kaji declares, "Man cannot live without endeavor, and this endeavoring can be either toward salvation or toward destruction" (2:27). This reaffirms the notion that a person's existence precedes their essence. However, Nishida wrote the following in 1934:

Reality is being and at the same time nothingness; it is being-and-nothingness [u-soku-mu], nothingness-and being; it is both subjective and objective, noetic and noematic. Reality is the unity of subjectivity and objectivity, and thus the self-identity of what is absolutely contradictory (29).

In the later works of Nishida, the concept of reality is explored as a dynamic and constantly evolving "identity of the absolute contradiction" (24) between subjective or relative nothingness and objective being. This means that absolute nothingness is the spatial and temporal "point" where individuals and objects interact and determine each other in a dialectical process known as the "self-determination of absolute nothingness." Essentially, this philosophy recognizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of all things and emphasizes the importance of understanding the relationship between subjective experience and objective reality. Overall, Nishida's work offers a distinctive perspective on the nature of reality and the role of individual consciousness in shaping our understanding of the world around us. Kaji once said, "There's no way to truly know what's happening" (2:27), highlighting the absurdity of the human experience as he recognizes the absence of a "real" method to comprehend reality. This encourages us to explore deeper into the

interconnectedness and interdependence of the world around us. Despite his efforts to find purpose in life, Kaji felt profoundly unhappy in light of war and injustice. By examining the absurdity of existentialism through the Kyoto School, we can push beyond the notion of being. By linking the protagonist's subjective experience with the objective reality beyond their control, existentialism can transcend the Western idea of 'being' and embrace the Eastern idea of 'no-being'.

Arendt posits that the concept of "*vita activa*" pertains to a way of living that embraces three key components: labor (necessary and repetitive tasks vital to one's survival), work (productive activities such as skilled craftsmanship), and action (the sphere of politics and public involvement) (Kateb 19). According to her, the ultimate form of human existence is found in the realm of action, where individuals unite to establish a shared world through dialogue and political participation. In Arendt's views, existence still precedes essence or the ability to and freedom to perform independent political action. This Western concept of 'being' is found throughout the Western philosophy of existentialism. However, Heidegger posited the idea in his philosophy multiple times. In his work, Heidegger makes a clear distinction between beings (*das Seiende*) and being (*das Sein*), which he refers to as the "ontological difference" (Kateb 35). When we focus solely on determinate things, being could be perceived as no-thing. Heidegger argues that it's essential to acknowledge the nothing of being and not reduce thinking only to a calculation of predetermined beings (Kateb 20). He calls "the nothing" (*das Nichts*) the "veil of being" (Kateb 27). We can only perceive beings, but being itself is hidden from us as nothing. Yet, it is the "nothing" that makes a clearing (*Lichtung*) for beings to reveal themselves (Kateb 22). As "nature (*phusis*) likes to keep secret", being allows determinate beings to emerge by hiding their indeterminate abundance into absence or self-concealment (Kateb 103–107). Although Heidegger talked about the negation of being, or 'no-self', this philosophy is still rooted in the existence of a 'being' in the first place (Kateb 100). Since Hannah Arendt was a student of Heidegger, she was immensely influenced by his philosophies on existentialism.

When viewed through Arendt's political lens, Kaji is a protagonist struggling to find meaning in dire circumstances. When he said, "Existence is a constant struggle to find meaning in a world that often seems meaningless" (2:23), the prerequisite for meaning has

already been set: existence itself. One is born into this absurd world, and then one goes through the human condition brought on by unjust state machinations. Arendt saw political action as a response to crises and events that disrupt the ordinary course of life.

Existentialism often addresses the significance of individual responses to crises and the creation of meaning in the face of adversity. Arendt emphasized the existential freedom of individuals to act in the political realm. She believed that political action arises from the exercise of individual freedom, where people can decide how they want to participate in shaping their shared world. This notion aligns with existentialist ideas about personal responsibility and choice. In his later writings, Nishitani uses the concept of *sūnyatā* from Mahāyāna Buddhism along with Nishida's term "absolute nothingness" in order to overcome the negative attachment to 'being' and the resulting nihilism that is present in modern society (Ueda 21). We see that when Kaji was sent to war, he also left his idealism behind and accepted his fate by overcoming his attachment to an unrealistic ideology. Although, he became a victim of a totalitarian system, we witness the character going through an existentialist transition throughout the film.

The Kyoto School's philosophers, such as Kitaro Nishida and Keiji Nishitani, explored existentialist themes, often centered on the individual's existence, freedom, and choice. In "In the Penal Colony," the condemned man's individuality and his struggle to make a choice regarding his own fate align with existentialist concerns. Franz Kafka's "The Penal Colony" mirrors the existential themes of absurdity, isolation, and search for meaningful identity in an indifferent world. The officer living according to the old regime's values and standards symbolizes an effort to enforce meaning to a disordered existence. He idolizes the customs and values of the penal colony by blindly revering its criminal justice system and extracting meaning from the terrible execution apparatus. However, on the other hand, the traveler mistrusts such a value system just like a person with an existential doubt. Such conflicting perspectives between the conformity of an officer and the doubt of a traveler illustrate the central concern of existentialism.

The submission of the Condemned man portrays a man on his journey towards 'no being.' While existence revolves around the idea of 'being', the compliance to objective reality after one's subjective helplessness as in Mahāyāna we find an explicit return — to a

“great affirmation” of a non-solidified understanding of being (Bercholz 155). Emptiness fully grasped is nothing distinct from or contrary to “being” rightly understood. (Bercholz 154). As the frequently recited verses of the Heart Sutra say: “[phenomenal] form is emptiness; emptiness is also [phenomenal] form; emptiness is not different from form; form is not different from emptiness” (Bercholz 155). The condemned man, who remains unnamed in the story, demonstrates a profound and almost passive acceptance of his impending execution. He is resigned to his fate and does not resist or attempt to escape his punishment. This submission can be seen as a reflection of the oppressive environment in which he finds himself, where resistance appears futile.

Within the story, there is an exploration of profound existential themes that delve into the nature of existence itself. The individual who has been condemned can be interpreted in multiple ways, with some seeing his expression as one of despair in the face of his inevitable fate. In contrast, others perceive it as a complete rejection of the concept of 'being.' This character's ultimate destiny is presented as being both meaningless and absurd, with his eventual submission being read as a response to the overwhelming sense of hopelessness that permeates the story on a deep, existential level.

The Kyoto School emphasizes the interconnectedness of the self and the world through the concept of absolute nothingness. It suggests that the self and the world are not separate entities but are fundamentally interconnected and rooted in this absolute nothingness. This idea challenges the traditional subject-object dualism in philosophy. Such interconnectedness requires a transformation from the ‘ego-self’ to the acceptance of the objective reality no matter how deplorable it might be. Kafka writes, "He thought: ‘In a very short time the needle will pierce me. That will happen soon. But at the moment it’s still above me; as long as it is not jabbed into me I can still pull my legs away, bend my body, take my head away from the needle, and can stop it from reaching me’” (7). These elements combine to create a suffocating atmosphere of hopelessness in "In the Penal Colony." The condemned man's predicament is one of absolute nothingness, where he is trapped in a Kafkaesque world of incomprehensible cruelty and imminent death, with no prospect of escape or redemption.

The Condemned Man's indifference to life or death makes him a character who has accepted the interconnectedness of subjective and objective realities. Miki, a member of Kyoto School, says in his work, *The Logic of Imagination*, that "nothingness is what transcends the subjective and the objective and envelopes them" (Fujita 315). Kafka writes, "The Condemned Man, incidentally, had an expression of such dog-like resignation that it looked as if one could set him free to roam around the slopes and would only have to whistle at the start of the execution for him to return" (1). The condemned man's desperation and hopelessness throughout the story can be interpreted as a response to the existential void or a certain emptiness. This kind of emptiness can be thought of as a complete rejection because it is a view that has refused and therefore gone beyond nothingness, which was already a step beyond all existence by denying it. In this sense, emptiness can be seen as completely separate and different from the usual view that is limited to existence, as long as one doesn't think of emptiness as something that exists on its own, apart from existence. On the other hand, then, emptiness is truly emptiness "only when it empties itself even of the perspective that depicts it as some 'thing' that is emptiness. (Nishitani 97).

When analyzing Kafka's "In the Penal Colony," one can view it through the perspective of "absolute nothingness" to delve into themes of absurdity, isolation, and the meaninglessness of life. The story prompts readers to consider the condemned man's futile efforts and how it relates to the human condition in a universe that can seem apathetic or incomprehensible.

The film, *The Human Condition*, delves into a complex examination of citizenship through the lens of Kaji's internal struggles with the expectations placed upon him as a citizen and the oppressive actions of the Japanese military. Initially, Kaji believes in the righteousness of his country's mission, but as he witnesses the brutality of war and the inhumane treatment of Chinese prisoners, he begins to question his beliefs. This leads to a deeper exploration of the responsibilities of a citizen during times of conflict, particularly when faced with difficult ethical and moral decisions. Throughout the film, Kaji reflects on his changing perspective on citizenship and duty. He grapples with his own conscience and the actions of his country, leading to many introspective moments. During a conversation about improving labor conditions, Kaaji, who recently became the Labor Supervisor,

responds to Mr. Okaza by saying, "Mistreating the workers won't produce good results" (20:34). At the start of the movie, Kaaji is depicted as a person with high moral standards. Mr. Okishima tried to intimidate Kaaji by saying, "what is wrong with slapping a cheek or two if it keeps the ore coming out and helps the war effort? What's more important: the ore or the workers?" (27:39). To this, Kaaji replies, "I don't think in those terms. It is ridiculous to compare men with ore" (27:52). Kaji advocates for better treatment of Chinese prisoners and workers. He emphasizes the importance of upholding human rights and dignity, even during wartime. His efforts to protect and support the Chinese people reflect his evolving sense of citizenship.

By the end of the film, there is a shift from moral standards and patriotism to pessimism and existentialism: Kaji is critical of blind patriotism that leads to atrocities. He questions the actions of his superiors and fellow soldiers, highlighting the dangers of unquestioning loyalty to the state. In one scene, Kaji expresses his thoughts on nationalism: "Nationalism... it's a kind of religion. It makes people think that they're the best in the world, and that they have the right to do anything to others" (2:23:57). Before receiving the Chinese prisoners, Kaaji engaged in a conversation with Mr. Chun. He says, "These are your fellow countrymen who lived in anti-Japanese areas. Your mother is from Shantung. Her friends might be among them"(32:49). Mr. Chun says, "My mother did not raise me to be anti-Japanese" (32:52). We witness this change in Kaaji's philosophy when he says, "In a battle zone, you would be killed as a sympathizer" (32:56). Throughout the film, Kaji grapples with his sense of duty to his country and his growing disillusionment with the actions of the Japanese military. His inner conflict is a recurring theme, and he often reflects on his changing feelings toward patriotism. Kaji's character undergoes a profound transformation throughout the film, reflecting his evolving subjectivity. As he witnesses the inhumane treatment of Chinese laborers and prisoners, he is torn between his loyalty to his country and his moral compass. His inner struggle is central to the narrative and highlights the subjectivity of individuals in wartime contexts.

The Kyoto School talks about overcoming nihilism by transcending nihilism. The concept of *sūnyatā* includes liberation from attachments to beings and avoiding reification or intentional appropriation of them. (Ueda 21). Kaaji may not have achieved absolute

nothingness, but his increasing pessimism and ongoing internal struggle with morality present us with a protagonist who surpasses existentialism and moves towards the realm of essence beyond mere existence. This can be viewed as a significant advancement in the concept of *sūnyatā*. Mr. Kageyama witnesses the growing dissatisfaction of Kaji and comments, “Being called up isn't a death sentence. I'm a born optimist. Unlike you, I've had my share of earthly pleasures” (2:04). Moreover, in a letter to Michiko, his wife, Kaaji says, “I sometimes think we're living in a time of meaningless transition, waiting for an inevitable change” (2:33:05). Kaji begins the film as an idealistic and optimistic individual who believes in the righteousness of his country's cause in World War II. However, as he witnesses the brutality of war, the mistreatment of Chinese prisoners, and the dehumanizing effects of conflict, he becomes increasingly disillusioned with the war and the ideology that drives it. His initial optimism gives way to a deep sense of pessimism about the human capacity for cruelty and destruction.

Examining Kaji's story through the lens of Hannah Arendt's analysis of the human condition deepens its resonance. Arendt's three-fold breakdown of the human condition - labor, work, and action - offers a useful framework for understanding Kaji's profound impact. Kaji's tireless efforts to improve the plight of Chinese prisoners (labor), his constructive actions to promote justice within the mining camp (work), and his steadfast resistance against the atrocities of war (action) all align with Arendt's framework, making his story all the more compelling.

As Arendt posits, the power to initiate action is the power to unleash a sequence of events with the potential to impact the world profoundly. The case of Kaji, who stood up against Watai's orders and motivated fellow prisoners of war to revolt, serves as a compelling illustration of this point. Despite facing insurmountable challenges, Kaji's actions catalyzed a transformative shift within his sphere of influence.

Arendt's writings propose the notion of a "public realm" as a space where individuals can freely express their distinct identities through their words and deeds (John 54). This is clearly demonstrated in the story of Kaji, who courageously speaks out against injustice, takes active measures to combat it, and embraces the repercussions of his decisions, thereby establishing his subjectivity even if that meant forsaking the national ideals.

In the context of the prevailing systemic violence and dehumanization, the character of Kaji embodies a powerful symbol of resistance, perseverance, and the indomitable strength of the human spirit. Through his unwavering commitment to his values and unrelenting pursuit of justice in the face of overwhelming adversity, Kaji represents a beacon of hope and inspiration for those seeking to challenge and overcome the forces of oppression and injustice. Indeed, Kaji's story stands as a testament to the enduring power of human resilience and the capacity of individuals to effect profound change in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

Throughout the film, Kaji grapples with his sense of self and moral identity. His inner conflicts and reflections on his actions and beliefs provide insight into his evolving understanding of himself. The film illustrates how external circumstances, such as the demands of war and the oppressive environment of the Japanese military, can shape and alter an individual's sense of self. When humans are subjected to ruthless state machinations, they experience a tenuous grasp on their own identity. When Okazaki became adamant about treating the prisoners inhumanely saying, "I'll stick to my own ways. Remember that" (28:14), Kaaji replied, "I'll stick to my ways too" (28:21). Throughout the film, we witness a continuous change in the ways and sense of self. Kaaji's character transforms from optimistic to existentialist and embarks on a journey towards negating his sense of self. In other words, his pessimistic or nihilistic attitude turns him into a protagonist who may also struggle with the concept of absolute nothingness and the interconnectedness of subjective and objective realities. One could interpret the film as a reflection of director Masaki Kobayashi's pessimism, but it could also be viewed as a realistic portrayal of the difficult conditions of war and an examination of humanity's ability to persevere in the face of extreme adversity.

Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs proposes a five-tier model of human needs, arranged hierarchically in a pyramid. Starting from the base of the pyramid, the needs are: physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. *The Human Condition I: No Greater Love* resonates with this theory, illustrating the unfortunate reality of how war and systemic oppression threaten the fulfilment of basic human needs. Through the characters' experiences, we witness their unwavering determination to overcome immense challenges in order to fulfil their physiological needs, such as hunger, thirst, and survival,

particularly in prisoners of war (POW) camps. Additionally, the characters must constantly contend with the precarious nature of their safety needs due to the war and inhumane working conditions. These struggles serve as a poignant reminder of the importance of addressing these issues to ensure that all individuals have access to the necessities of life.

However, the film delves into the concept of self-actualization, which is the highest level in Maslow's hierarchy. This resonates strongly with Kaji's journey in the film, as he strives to achieve his full potential despite the challenging circumstances he faces. Kaji remains true to his moral values and fights against injustice, demonstrating his unwavering dedication to becoming the best version of himself - a kind and virtuous person. The title of the film "No Greater Love" pertains to the idea of achieving self-actualization. Kaji's conduct exemplifies a profound sense of love not only for intimate or familial relationships but also for all of humanity. This demonstrates the ultimate level of self-actualization, wherein one remains devoted to their values and convictions, even when faced with the most formidable challenges life offers.

Arendt emphasizes the importance of political action and the public sphere in her philosophy. She argues that active participation in public life is essential for human dignity and the preservation of freedom. In *The Human Condition: No Greater Love*, Kaji's actions and attempts to resist the mistreatment of others reflect a commitment to moral and political action in the face of wartime atrocities.

For Arendt, 'labor' is the most basic and necessary mode of human activity (Kateb 08). It involves the repetitive and cyclical processes of providing for one's biological needs, such as food, shelter, and clothing. Labor is characterized by its instrumental nature, oriented towards satisfying immediate biological necessities. Labor does not lead to the creation of a lasting or meaningful world. Instead, it is a continuous cycle of consumption and reproduction. Arendt argues that the modern world, particularly in capitalist societies, has excessively emphasized labor, reducing individuals to mere laborers and emphasizing the pursuit of economic gain above all else (Kateb 34).

Arendt's theoretical framework delineates labor, work, and action, with the latter being the pinnacle of value within the socio-political sphere, akin to Maslow's hierarchy of human needs. During wartime, human life is reduced to labor only which makes it impossible

for them to reach their true 'self'. For instance, When Okishima said, "What's more important: the ore or the workers?" (27:39), one can witness that human life is reduced to a means of production and it becomes limited to the labor it bears. Abuse forms an integral motif in *The Human Condition I: No Greater Love*, acting as a stark manifestation of the power dynamics and the dehumanizing effects of war and totalitarianism. It resonates with Hannah Arendt's concept of the "banality of evil". Arendt used the term "banality of evil" in order to describe the idea that evil acts, even ones of enormous scale and consequence, can be committed by individuals who are only following orders or abiding by societal norms without critically thinking about the morality of their actions. Kaji says, "War turns ordinary men into killers, and it is a heavy burden to bear" (2:33:44). There is a certain "thoughtlessness" about such an act.

Arendt emphasized the role of thoughtlessness in enabling evil. She believed that people like Eichmann engaged in thoughtless behavior, failing to consider their actions' consequences or moral implications. Arendt's examination of Eichmann's case raised important questions about individual responsibility within bureaucratic systems. She argued that people could abdicate their moral responsibility when they act as cogs in a bureaucratic machine. Arendt's exploration of the banality of evil challenges common notions of evil as something extraordinary or monstrous. In the film, the evil became 'banal' or ordinary as ordinary humans in authority commit murders left and right.

One important issue that needs to be addressed is the systemic abuse present in exploitative labor practices, an unjust legal system, and the constant dehumanization of individuals. This abuse is an inherent component of totalitarianism disguised by the appearance of legality and normalcy. It has become a silent part of daily life and serves to normalize violence and oppression.

Kafka portrays how repressive regimes destructively affect the human psyche and society as a whole. The penal colony's flawed criminal justice system, driven by a deplorable machine of punishment, inhibits personal autonomy and human creativity. Such repression results in a society that is devoid of empathy and sensitivity, as is evident from the officer's non-sensible behavior and actions. He was unable to empathize with the suffering of other

people. A society that is based on maintaining strict control only contributes to the misery of humans.

The officer's thoughtless obedience to the authority of the old regime can also be analyzed through the lens of the "Banality of Evil" concept put forward by the German-born American historian and political philosopher Hannah Arendt. According to this concept, a person does not commit evil solely on the basis of his or her intentions but also due to his or her thoughtless and blind obedience to an overarching authority. The officer's unwavering dedication towards the execution apparatus and the process of giving punishment shows the banality of his involvement in the system of a repressive regime. Hence, it shows that individual autonomy within a repressive regime is just an illusion because his or her thoughts and actions are not his or her own.

The story depicts the condemned man as someone who is dehumanized by the penal colony's apparatus and the system it represents. The officer and the execution process are treated as normal elements of this society, and the moral implications of their actions are not seriously questioned. This aligns with the idea of "thoughtlessness" in the banality of evil, where individuals fail to assess the morality of their actions critically. Kafka writes in the story, "The traveler only understood when the Commandant was speaking. When the Officer began his explanation, the traveler no longer listened, as if he were expecting everything. In his overexcitement, he covered his mouth with both hands and looked back at the hideous device" (4) - This passage highlights the traveler's passive acceptance of the surreal punishment device, which can be seen as an example of thoughtless obedience, a characteristic of the "banality of evil."

Furthermore, when the Officer says, "He said that the condemned man was not even aware of the sentence, and in fact he had no idea of it at all" (Kafka 14), it denotes that the isolation of the condemned man and the lack of transparency in the system, reflecting how individuals can be subjected to extreme cruelty without a full understanding of their fate, which is another aspect of the "banality of evil". While Kafka's story predates Hannah Arendt's formulation of the concept of the banality of evil (203), it explores similar themes of thoughtless obedience, moral blindness, and the dehumanizing effects of oppressive systems, which Arendt later examined in the context of the Holocaust.

The Human Condition trilogy delves into authoritarianism in WWII Japan through Kaji's experiences. The trilogy is set against the backdrop of Japan's militarism and expansionism during World War II. It portrays the rise of a totalitarian state and its impact on the lives of ordinary people, including Kaji, who is initially idealistic but becomes disillusioned with the authoritarian regime. The films depict the bureaucracy and rigid hierarchical structures of the Japanese military. Kaji encounters numerous instances where individuals are expected to obey orders without question, reflecting the authoritarian nature of the system. Kaji's journey in the trilogy involves a struggle between conforming to the authoritarian demands of the state and resisting its injustices. His refusal to mistreat Chinese prisoners and his efforts to protect his own humanity in the face of authoritarianism are central to the narrative.

There are many instances where the human condition has been raised as a result of totalitarian injustice and cruelty. Kaji describes the condition of labour camps in the following words, “Bad quarters, poor food. Men can’t work on beans alone” (22:56). The films depict the dehumanizing effects of authoritarianism, both on the oppressed and the oppressors. Kaji witnesses the brutal treatment of Chinese laborers and experiences the erosion of his own humanity as he is drawn into the machinery of war. Kaji while talking his subordinates as a Labour Supervisor says, “ But there is a still greater evil. You know what that is? You men” (23:10). Hannah Arendt's concept of the "banality of evil" is discussed in her book "Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil". She said, "The deeds were monstrous, but the doer... was quite ordinary, commonplace, and neither demonic nor monstrous” (21). When left unsupervised by democratic laws, humans' true nature is revealed in a primal depiction of evil during war.

“It’s not my fault that I’m Japanese . . . yet it’s my worst crime that I am!” (3:01:21). These words belong to Kaji, the protagonist of *The Human Condition* (1959-61). However, in his existential despair and anguish, he also represents the film's director, Masaki Kobayashi, whose life mirrored that of his character. Like Kaji, Kobayashi was unwillingly involved in his country's wartime aggression and felt trapped by it. Okazaki, on the verge of murdering Chinese prisoners, says, “It’s best to wet the blade. Keeps the fat off” (2:54:24). Totalitarianism, as indicated by Hannah Arendt, often leads to dehumanization and brutality.

The trilogy depicts the brutal treatment of Chinese laborers and prisoners of war, emphasizing the dehumanizing effects of war and totalitarianism on both the oppressed and the oppressors.

As *The Human Condition I: No Greater Love* nears its end, Kaji becomes embroiled in a series of harrowing events. The first of these involves him being compelled to witness the execution of a group of Chinese prisoners. In a chilling display, we see Kaji struggling with his own helplessness in the face of such cruelty, as his every expression betrays his inner turmoil.

In the chaos that follows, Kaji confronts Sergeant Watai. Despite Watai's attempt to strike him with a blade, Kaji refuses to move. Inspired by his actions, the Chinese POWs start chanting "murderers!" and don't back down when Watai's soldiers point their guns. Fearing a revolt, Watai decides to call off the execution.

In the aftermath of these events, Kaji is falsely accused of being a Red sympathizer and is arrested. He is then subjected to Watai's abuse and torture, where he is continually beaten despite his pleas of innocence and desperate attempts to reason with his accusers. In the end, however, he is let go and relieved of his duties as labor camp supervisor at the mining operation in Japanese-colonized Manchuria. However, there is a significant price to pay for his actions: he is compelled to join the Imperial Japanese Army. The film's concluding scenes poignantly depict the cruel twist of fate in Kaji's life: his pursuit of peace and justice leads him directly into the midst of the war he has been trying to escape.

Nishida differentiates the Eastern "logic of the heart-mind" from the Western "logic of things" (Davis 20). He believes that absolute nothingness is the spatial and the temporal "place" where individuals and things determine each other in their mutual interactions (Davis 24). One can argue that the subject of existentialism differs from that of Western definition due to transcendence. Nihilism is not just a negation of "being", but an interaction between the "being" and "material" world (Davis 32).

If we examine *The Human Condition* through Nishida's concept of 'reality', we can arrive at a nihilistic notion that is rather anti-war. For instance, Kyôritsu Ô drew a more realistic picture when he said, "You'll either be revealed as a murderer wearing the mask of

humanism or as one worthy of the beautiful name... 'man'. ." (2:01:44). The philosophical schools of thought, such as humanism, give more importance to human matters rather than divine or supernatural ones. However, Nishida believes that the solution to the problem of modern existentialism is not to swing between extremes like humanism, being, or nihilism. Instead, the solution lies in having a realistic interaction between the "being" and the "material" world. In other words, we need to shake hands with reality.

According to Nishida, the meeting of subjects and objects occurs in a state of absolute nothingness, which is also the space where people and things coexist (Davis 40). This is where they come into being and eventually fade away. It is not just a place for intellectual assessments, but also for birth and death. Nishida refers to this ultimate "groundless ground" that encompasses all existence as "the place of true nothingness" (Davis 39). Despite not being a definite entity, it is not a static emptiness. It should be viewed as both the ontological origin of beings and the epistemic source of consciousness. He stresses two points. First, he insists on the need for radical interpersonal difference within the place of absolute nothingness. Second, he contends that "consciousness" does not imply an insurmountable epistemological gap between subject and object (Davis 40). Nishida first adopted the idea of "pure experience" from William James to convey the non-dual foundation of knowledge, but he later substituted it with the concept of "self-awareness" (Nishida 99). Nishida defines self-awareness as a "self that reflects itself within itself (Nishida 99). According to this idea, nothingness can actually lead to a state of self-awareness that creates a balance between a person and their surroundings. This means that there is no conflict between the individual and the world around them, but rather a peaceful coexistence where every action has a meaningful purpose (Nishida 100).

Nishida argues that we can approach the ideal by emptying ourselves of the ego. He said, "by truly emptying the self, the field of consciousness can reflect an object just as it is" (Nishida 200). The self can reach a state of absolute nothingness, which allows it to truly connect with other beings. This is achieved by emptying oneself through a process of an internal transcendence which takes the self back through reaching within the depths of the field of consciousness. One can say that it is the mutual interaction of things and individuals that involves a deep awareness, surrender, humility, and acceptance, as opposed to the

Western concept of nothingness. For example, in the film *The Human Condition*, multiple instances show that Kaji is aware of the contradictions and dilemmas that he faces as a Japanese soldier. While addressing Shinjo, he said, “I’ll go with you. I’ll share your fate” (1:20:21). These lines indicate that Kaji's sense of self or subjectivity is aligned with his moral or objective understanding of 'fate'. This implies that the state of existentialism has not caused him to lose his faith, but rather has enabled him to rise above his own existence and submit to his fate.

The question of how to reach the state of absolute nothingness was a pressing issue due to the prevalence of two extremes in modern society. There are two complications. One is the excessive emphasis on the subjective ego and the related technological control and exploitation of things. The other is the nihilistic tendency that denies the reality of both the self and the world. Nishitani thought that humanism and science were unable to solve this problem of objectification or nullification, and they actually caused it (98). In a time of and growing nihilism and secular egoism, how can one reach the state of absolute nothingness? The answer is simple. Nishitani claimed that to free humans from their egoistic fixations and objectifying domination in the dualistic “realm of being and consciousness,” it was essential to first retreat into the “realm of nothingness” and surpass it by going beyond nothingness itself, attaining a state of absolute nothingness (97). This is a standpoint of “non-ego” (Ueda 21). For example, in the film *The Human Condition*, there have been many occurrences where Kaji had to rise above nihilism into an awareness or a transcendence to a non-ego self to deal with the matter at hand. For instance, when he says, “I refuse to die” (1:59:02) . The text appears to be a literary analysis of a protagonist's attitude in a given context. The author argues that the protagonist did not reach an extreme level of nihilism despite the hostility he faced from state apparatuses. This indicates that the protagonist did not give up on life or on his own existence and did not deny the reality of both himself and the objective world.

The risks of political intervention are more evident when philosophical thinkers are in a nation that is heading for injustice and calamity.. This is extremely prevalent in the film *The Human Condition* where human beings are being stripped off their basic human rights and their very existence. In the retrospect Nishitani wrote:

My attempt was, on the one hand, to explain where Japan was situated within the world to those intellectuals remaining on the sidelines [of politics]; and, on the other hand, with respect to the extremely nationalistic thought that was becoming increasingly prevalent at the time, I attempted from within to open up a path for overcoming this extreme nationalism (199)

Moreover, in Nishida's book, *Principles for a New World Order*, he claims that the "co-prosperity sphere" must not entail either ethnocentrism, expansionism, imperialism, colonialism, or totalitarianism (Nishida 432-433). The Kyoto School's philosophy offers a solution to the threat of totalitarianism on existence. When Kaji says, "It's not my fault that I'm Japanese, yet it's my worst crime that I am" (2:55:03), he's basically breaking the narratives of extreme modernity and nationalism "It is a plea for transcendence, not through death or Western nihilism, but through peacefully accepting and submitting to life itself and the world around us. It is almost a rejection of the idea of isolation that a capitalized modern world creates by establishing borders and waging wars that promote a sense of otherness. We, as humans, can only thrive by setting aside our ego-self and working together in peace.

Hannah Arendt's work offers a profound exploration of the dynamics of power, authority, and morality in the context of human societies. Arendt's analysis of totalitarianism, particularly in her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, delves into the injustice and brutality of authoritarian regimes. She examines how totalitarian governments systematically strip individuals of their rights, subjecting them to extreme forms of injustice. In her book *The Human Condition* she says, "No cause is left but the most ancient of all, the one, in fact, that from the beginning of our history has determined the very existence of politics, the cause of freedom versus tyranny" (221).

Hannah Arendt believed that taking action is vital as it holds the potential to bring about substantial transformations in our world. This is exemplified by Kaji's act of rebellion against Watai, which inspired other prisoners of war to join the fight. Such instances illustrate the power of human agency to initiate positive change, even when the odds seem insurmountable, within a particular sphere of influence.

As elucidated in her works on political theory and human action, Hannah Arendt's philosophical framework provides a theoretical lens through which we can analyze the

dynamics of agency, power, and the potential for initiating shifts in the prevailing social and political landscape. In this context, Kaji's acts of insubordination and the ensuing mobilization of fellow POWs serve as concrete manifestations of how individuals, through their actions, can disrupt established hierarchies and norms, thereby effecting change in their immediate environment.

Within the purview of Arendt's perspective on the human condition, we can discern the significance of such instances of action. In her exploration of the nature of political action and its impact on the course of history, Arendt underscores the vital role played by individuals in instigating, shaping, and altering the trajectories of events. Thus, Kaji's actions and their repercussions are emblematic of Arendt's belief in the transformative potential inherent in human agency, even when confronted with seemingly authoritarian regimes.

Arendt distinguished between power and authority. Power, for her, emerges from collective action and political participation in the public realm, while authority is often associated with hierarchical structures and the enforcement of rules. In "The Penal Colony", the officer represents authority, and his unwavering commitment to the apparatus demonstrates how authority can be wielded without accountability. The story illustrates how unchecked authority can lead to brutality and the human condition.

Arendt analyzed the dehumanizing effects of bureaucracy and the potential for individuals to become mere cogs in a bureaucratic machine. The penal colony is characterized by a rigid and bureaucratic process, with the execution apparatus itself serving as a symbol of this dehumanization. The system subsumes the characters, reflecting Arendt's concerns about the loss of individual agency within bureaucratic structures. The concept of nationality and nationalism is challenged when it comes to the dehumanization of subjects by repressive regimes. The following lines from "The Penal Colony" explicitly talk about such conformity by people, an indulgence in mob mentality, and a collective thoughtlessness:

The Traveller was thinking that intervening decisively in strange circumstances is always questionable. He was neither a citizen of the penal colony nor a citizen of the state to which it belonged. If he wanted to condemn the execution or even hinder it, people could say to him: You are a foreigner—keep quiet. He would have nothing in response to that, but could only add that he did not understand what he was doing on

this occasion, for the purpose of his traveling was merely to observe and not to alter other people's judicial systems in any way. (Kafka 9)

Kafka also raises prominent questions regarding justice and corruption within a society. The execution apparatus that was in the first place, designed to serve justice within a society was used for committing brutalities leading to corruption. This shows the irony of institutions based on the pretext of justice turning into a mechanism of oppression.

Arendt extensively studied totalitarian regimes, particularly in her work, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. She noted that one of the distinguishing features of totalitarian systems is the high degree of conformity they demand from their citizens. Totalitarian states seek to eliminate dissent and enforce strict ideological conformity, often through surveillance, propaganda, and coercion. This is often achieved by instilling an idea of patriotism that makes people on the adjacent border 'others' or 'aliens' (Kareb 22).

Hannah Arendt's views on conformity were shaped by her observations of totalitarianism and her exploration of the relationship between conformity, thoughtlessness, and the perpetuation of evil. She highlighted the dangers of unquestioning obedience to authority and the importance of preserving individual moral responsibility and the public realm as spaces for critical engagement and resistance to conformity.

CONCLUSION

4.1 Finding of the Study

By interpreting the perspectives of Hannah Arendt and the Kyoto School, this study has provided insight into the human condition and existentialism. Arendt's work, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, focused extensively on totalitarian regimes. The investigation of the subject matter, the human condition, was approached through the political theory of Arendt. Through a series of later studies, she developed a political theory centered on three types of activities: "labor," "work," and "action" (Kateb 21). Labor is defined as meeting basic needs, work is tied to the condition of worldliness, and action is a social activity in a public sphere. Arendt views action, or "vita activa," as the activity that preserves the existential values of humans in any society (Kateb 22). She regards political action as the noblest of all activities. For Arendt, the espousal of political action grows not out of moral concern but out of her existential values, which political action is intended to serve. The dilapidation of the human condition occurs when our core values are brought into question.

The selected works contributing to the expansion of the human condition are interpreted through a fusion of Arendt's and The Kyoto School's philosophy on existentialism. The Kyoto School played a crucial role in this research by offering an ontologically different paradigm to counterbalance Western existentialist philosophy, such as Arendt's. Arendt's political theory provided a Western perspective to analyze the systemic evil that leads to existential loss. At the same time, the Kyoto School assimilates Arendt's philosophy to create a distinct moral insight specific to East Asian culture and tradition. I aimed to create an East/West dialogue regarding the human condition and emphasized throughout the study that the challenge of existentialism is universal. The Kyoto School philosophy revolves around the concept of "absolute nothingness." Unlike Western philosophy that focuses on the idea of "being," and what it means to "be" or "exist," The Kyoto School raises the question of "what is nothingness?" (Nishida 221). For instance, Nishida and his colleagues examine Western ontology critically to create an Eastern meontology or "logic of nothingness" while attempting to blend an Eastern "logic of heart-mind with a Western "logic of things" (Ueda 200). Kitaro Nishida, the creator of the school,

describes the transcendental subjectivity of consciousness or the heart-mind as a method to investigate both subjective and objective facets of reality (absolute nothingness). This perspective afforded greater opportunities to analyze existential nihilism which formed an integral part of the selected works (Nishida 222).

The first research question examines the effect of Western being and Eastern no-self on the human condition subjected to repressive regimes. This research has provided an extensive insight on how the different conceptualizations of being and no-being, and existentialism, and absolute nothingness can provide a cross-cultural perspective to analyze the human condition. This study analyzed Masaki Kobayashi's first volume of *The Human Condition* trilogy and Kafka's short story "The Penal Colony." The focus of this study was on the various interpretations of the human condition in the context of modernity, particularly those presented by Hannah Arendt. Additionally, this research conducted a thorough critique of existentialist concepts related to the self, state, and subjectivity/citizenship in the selected works using the ideas of Arendt, Nishida, and Nishitani. The central theme of this research was the human condition and the existentialism that arises when individuals are faced with unjust totalitarian injustice. It examined how primal instincts to kill or be killed surface when the external political environment becomes hostile (Arendt 66). Through our research, we discovered that the human condition is a shared experience between the East and the West, and corruption and power abuse are present worldwide, without regard for borders or nationalism.

5.2 Recommendations for the Future Studies

This study has interpreted the first volume of the film *The Human Condition* and Kafka's short story, "The Penal Colony" under the political theory of Hannah Arendt and the existentialist stances taken by Nishida and Nishitani. All of these ideas are distinct while simultaneously being connected to one another. These concepts have the potential to be investigated further in the context of existentialism and the human condition in forthcoming research. Moreover, the study can provide the rationale for understanding existentialism from an Eastern approach along with the Western perspective. Since the introspection from the Eastern lens is still in its formative stages, subsequent research may reveal holes in this

theoretical concept, which may lead to the discovery of new fields in which to conduct research.

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