

AN ANALYSIS OF THE CONGRUENCE BETWEEN THE TENETS OF SARTRE'S EXISTENTIALISM AND INGLEHART'S MODERN CULTURAL VALUES

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Abstract

This study examines the congruence between Inglehart's modern cultural values and Sartre's existentialist tenets. Despite their dissimilar origins and methodologies, significant alignment is found between Sartre's existentialist principles, socioeconomic progress and Inglehart's modern cultural values. The alignment between the two perspectives arises from their shared focus on ideas such as anti-essentialism, individualism, human rights, humanism, egalitarianism, gender equality, tolerance, secularity, instrumental rationality, autonomy and self-expression, which often emerge as outcomes of socioeconomic development. In societies where meeting basic needs and ensuring survival have priority, the pursuit of existentialist ideas such as authenticity and individualism may be overshadowed by socioeconomic deprivation. Given the substantial congruence between the two frameworks, it is proposed that the growing popularity of existentialism can be attributed to the socioeconomic progress in Western societies and the subsequent rise of modern cultural values during the twentieth century. The paper concludes by presenting the findings and discussing theoretical and practical implications.

Keywords

Culture, modernization theory, existentialism, Sartre, individualism.

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1. Introduction

The existentialism school of thought traces its origins to Soren Kierkegaard, a Danish philosopher from the 19th century who served as a major inspiration for existentialism in its recognizable form. Furthermore, renowned thinkers like Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, Simone de Beauvoir and particularly Jean-Paul Sartre contributed to the development of existential philosophy (Baert, 2015). Existentialism emerged as a philosophical movement characterized by a deep concern with the nature of human existence and the individual's struggle to find meaning in an often chaotic and absurd world. Existentialist philosophers approach the fundamental questions of existence from various perspectives, but they share a common focus on subjective experience, personal responsibility and the inherent freedom of individuals (Flynn, 2017). Unlike many other philosophical schools, existentialism does not adhere to a rigid system or set of doctrines. It is not concerned with developing a comprehensive theory or a strict logical methodology. Instead, existentialism is akin to a cultural attitude or a way of

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approaching life (Baert, 2015; Crowell, 2012; Magrini, 2012). Existentialist philosophers contemplate the meaning of life in the face of death, exploring themes of authenticity, courage and the pursuit of genuine personal values amid uncertainty. Existentialism found expression not only in philosophical discourse but also in literature, psychology and arts. For instance, writers such as Fyodor Dostoevsky, Franz Kafka and Albert Camus depicted characters grappling with existential issues, highlighting the internal struggles and moral dilemmas that arise in the human condition (Crowell, 2012; Flynn, 2017).

Inglehart's Modernization theory (1997) is a sociological theory that seeks to explain the cultural changes occurring in societies as they undergo socioeconomic development. The theory was developed by Ronald Inglehart, a political scientist, in the late 20th century and has since been expanded upon by Inglehart and Welzel (2005). According to the theory, modernization is a process that encompasses economic development, technological advancements and cultural changes, which collectively transform societies from traditional to modern forms. The modernization theory has been supported by empirical evidence from numerous cross-national surveys conducted through the World Value Survey (Inglehart *et al.*, 2000).

What is the relationship between Sartre's existentialism and Inglehart's Modernization theory? Existentialism is an abstract philosophical school of thought, while Modernization theory is an empirically-driven sociological/political research framework. The first philosophizes the human conditions and their existence. The second offers a theory explaining the interplay between economic development and cultural change. Despite their different origins and methods, Modernization theory and existentialism are both concerned with the human conditions in the contemporary world and may be considered as the consequences of socioeconomic development. Indeed, one of the central themes in Inglehart's Modernization theory is the concept of existential needs. Accordingly, as societies progress and experience higher levels of economic development, a transition occurs in fulfilling the existential (survival) needs (Inglehart & Oyserman, 2004). As basic and existential (survival) needs become more reliably met, people prioritize other needs, such as self-expression, individual autonomy, free-thinking and personal fulfillment. In other words, when socioeconomic conditions improve and existential (survival) threats decrease, the Sartrean existentialism questions gain importance: What is the meaning of life? Is life worth living? How does one navigate an absurd world devoid of inherent meaning or purpose? Sartre argues that individuals should embrace their autonomy, make choices based on their own and take responsibility for the impact of their actions on themselves and others. This process of self-definition in Sartrean existentialism relies on some major tenets that resonate with the modern/post-modern cultural values proposed by Inglehart's Modernization theory (Inglehart & Welzel, 2010).

Given the abovementioned commonalities, the current study analyzes the congruence between the nine significant tenets of Sartre's existentialism and Inglehart's modern cultural values. We focus on Sartrean existentialism as it is the contemporary and the most popular school of thought which significantly impacted intellectual, cultural, political and literary movements and unlike other philosophies, captured the attention of the general public (Crowell, 2012; Magrini, 2012). The analyses show significant congruence between Sartre's existentialist tenets, socioeconomic development and Inglehart's modern cultural values. The alignment arises particularly from their shared focus on individual responsibility, autonomy, human rights, freedom, the pursuit of personal fulfillment, secularity, rationality and self-expression.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. First, Inglehart's Modernization theory and traditional/modern cultural values are reviewed. Next, the nine major tenets of Sartre's existentialism are explained. Then, the congruence between Inglehart's modern cultural values and Sartre's existentialist tenets is analyzed and some propositions are formulated. Finally, the findings are presented and theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

2. Traditional vs. Modern

Over 8,000 years of human history can be called "traditional" because people relied on hunting, gathering and farming as their primary mode of economic production and subsistence. During this extended period, the world human population was limited to less than 400 million, life expectancy was less than 30 years (Roser *et al.*, 2013) and all standards of living, including hygiene, infant mortality, literacy and wealth per capita, remained extremely low. In the 16th and 17th centuries, modernization pushed medieval and feudal Europe towards another path, revolutionized production methods and transformed human relations. Modernity or modernization is an umbrella term referring to a wide range of philosophical, scientific, technological, economic and cultural transformations. These changes seem to follow a universal evolutionary pattern (Bell, 1976; Inglehart, 1997; Parsons, 1985).

2.1. Traditional Societies

Traditional societies are characterized by subsistence-based economies, where individuals depend on hunting, gathering and farming for their livelihood. Economic activity is often organized around family and community units, with little foreign trade. In traditional societies, the social structure is often hierarchical and based on kinship and family relationships. The extended family, clan or tribe is the basic unit of social organization and individuals are expected to adhere to their group's customs, traditions and social norms. Traditional societies strongly emphasize community, cooperation and mutual support and individuals are expected to contribute to the common good rather than simply pursue their interests (Inglehart, 1997). Gender roles in traditional societies are often clearly defined, with men and women having different roles and responsibilities. In many traditional societies, men are responsible for hunting, fishing and farming, while women care for the household and the children. Traditional societies often have a strong sense of shared identity based on common language, customs and beliefs. Oral tradition is also an important aspect of traditional societies and storytelling is often used to orally pass on knowledge, traditions and cultural values from generation to generation. Religion often plays a central role in traditional societies, with belief systems deeply rooted in the culture and history of the group (Inglehart, 1997).

2.2. Modern Societies

As societies modernize, their economies move from agricultural to industrial and tertiary. They rely increasingly on science and technology, move away from religion and tradition, carry out rational and calculated actions, develop divisions of labor, emphasize the predominance of individuality and distance from hereditary status and privilege to universalism (Bell, 1973; Parsons, 1985). In modern societies, social mobility and individualism are highly valued and people can often pursue their interests and aspirations regardless of family background or social status. Nuclear families, rather than extended

families or clans, are often the basic unit of social organization. Modern societies are characterized by highly developed market economies, often organized around large corporations and global supply chains. Economic activities are highly specialized and individuals often have a narrow range of professional skills that are in demand in the marketplace. Modern societies also tend to have high levels of consumption and materialism, with people often defining their social status and identity by consuming goods and services. Pursuing economic growth and profit is often a driving force in modern societies. Modern societies can also be characterized by a greater separation of religion and government and a greater emphasis on individual freedom of thought and expression. They are associated with several institutions and ideas, including the nation-state or an international system of states, bureaucracy, industrialization, secularism, materialism, rationalism, individualism and capitalism (Hall & Gieben, 1992; Inglehart & Welzel, 2010).

3. Modernization Theory and the Human Development Perspective

According to modernization theory, socioeconomic development is linked with coherent and almost predictable cultural changes (Bell, 1973, 1976; Huntington, 1968). Modernization expands man's rational control over physical and social environments (Rustow, 1967; Weber, 1958). Modernization increases society's economic and political capabilities through industrialization and bureaucratization and involves many processes, such as urbanization, social mobilization and occupational differentiation, that make societies more complex (Bendix, 1974; Durkheim & Luhmann, 1988). Empirical evidence shows that socioeconomic development affects various societies almost in the same way. Socioeconomic development accompanied by technological advancement and labor productivity brings about various changes, including occupational specialization, rising educational levels, higher income levels and human interaction diversification. Modernization ultimately causes cultural transformations such as changing gender roles, attitudes toward authority, sexual norms, declining fertility rates and broader political participation (Inglehart, 1997). In short, the modernization theory suggests that socioeconomic development brings about systematic cultural transformations. Despite some criticism, Inglehart's theory remains influential in the relationship between culture and economic development. It highlights how economic and social changes can shape cultural values and offers insight into these changes' political and social implications.

3.1. Traditional vs. Modern Cultural Values

According to Inglehart (1997), modernization leads to two distinct dimensions of cultural change: 1) Traditional versus Secular-rational and 2) Survival versus Self-expression values.

3.1.1. Traditional vs. Secular-rational

The dimension of traditional versus secular-rational value reflects the contrast between societies in which tradition and religion are critical and those in which they are not (Inglehart, 1997; Inglehart & Baker, 2000).

Traditional values emphasize the importance of religion, family and social conformity. Therefore, traditional values are marked by a) importance of religion, b) strong family and community bonds and c) respect for authority and hierarchy. Traditional values often place a significant emphasis on religious beliefs and practices.

Traditional values prioritize the preservation of the family unit and the community's cohesion. According to Inglehart (1997), traditional values reject divorce, abortion, euthanasia and suicide (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). They emphasize respect for elders and maintain traditional gender roles within the family structure. Finally, traditional societies tend to uphold hierarchical structures and respect for authority figures, such as political leaders, religious leaders and elders. There is an emphasis on obedience, social order and stability.

Secular-rational values emerge in more modern and developed societies, where individualism, personal autonomy and rationality gain prominence over traditional norms and religious influence. As such, Secular-rational values emphasize a) human rationality and skepticism, b) weak family and community bonds and c) egalitarianism. Secular-rational values emphasize rationality to the detriment of religion and tolerate divorce, abortion, euthanasia and suicide (Inglehart, 1997; Inglehart & Baker, 2000). More importantly, Secular-rational values favor egalitarian social structures and social justice.

3.1.2. Survival and Self-expression

Survival values are associated with societies facing economic insecurity, social instability and physical threats. Societies characterized by survival values display relatively low levels of subjective well-being, report relatively poor health, tend to be intolerant of outgroups, such as strangers, women and homosexuals, rank relatively low on interpersonal trust and emphasize hard work rather than imagination or tolerance. Survival values emphasize economic and physical security, maintain social order and underline distinct gender roles. Self-expression values emerge in societies with a certain level of economic development, security and prosperity. Self-expression values are associated with more modern societies and emphasize individual autonomy, self-expression and the pursuit of personal fulfillment. These values prioritize creativity, diversity and tolerance and tend to be associated with secular and liberal worldviews. They emphasize the importance of individual freedom and self-expression and challenge traditional norms and institutions.

Inglehart and Baker (2000) have empirically shown that societies with a high percentage of the workforce employed in agriculture tend to emphasize traditional values, while those with a high percentage engaged in the industry are likely to adopt secular-rational values (Inglehart *et al.*, 1997, 2000, 2005). Inglehart (1997) argues that the transition to secular and rational values is the product of economic development and social modernization. As societies become more developed and secure, they shift from traditional to secular-rational values. This shift has important implications for social and political outcomes. For example, societies with higher levels of secular-rational values tend to be more democratic, economically prosperous and socially liberal. They value individual rights and freedoms and accept diversity and alternative lifestyles. In contrast, societies with higher levels of traditional values tend to be more authoritarian, economically stagnant and socially conservative. They may emphasize traditional social norms and values more and be less accepting of alternative lifestyles or cultural practices.

4. The Main Tenets of Sartre's Existentialism

Sartre's existentialism is a philosophical movement that first emerged during the mid-20th century in the wake of World War II. It profoundly influenced various

disciplines, including philosophy, literature and psychology. The following tenets characterize Sartre's existentialism.

4.1. Existence Precedes Essence

The notion of “Existence Precedes Essence” was proposed by existentialist thinkers as rejecting essentialism (Sartre, 1956). In a broad sense, essentialism refers to the intrinsic properties that define an entity, namely human beings. Greek philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle and religious doctrines supported the significance of essentialism and the notion that God designed humans with a specific purpose even prior to their existence (Cooper & Hutchinson, 1997). In the conventional Christian worldview, humans are believed to be created by God in His own image, with a predetermined life purpose. This belief system endured for centuries and was widely accepted by the medieval church. However, in the 19th century, Enlightenment thinkers began to question the notion of human essentialism. Modern thinkers and existentialists, in particular, challenged the traditional belief in human essentialism, asserting that it is up to “individuals” to discover their own authentic essence. According to Sartre, unlike other species, humans are the product of their choices throughout life and their essence emerges from their existence. In other words, essence is not predetermined and individuals are responsible for shaping their own being (Crowell, 2012; Sartre, 1956). Sartre argues that no preexisting essence is bestowed by God or nature, dictating our actions or destiny (Nodelman *et al.*, 1995).

Consequently, each individual must define their own essence, which is formed by the cumulative impact of their actions. The existentialist slogan, “Existence precedes Essence”, implies several vital consequences. Firstly, it suggests that we do not possess a predetermined nature or essence that governs our being, actions or what is valuable to us. Secondly, it highlights that we are free to act independently without external influences. Thirdly, it emphasizes that we create our human nature by exercising this freedom. Lastly, it asserts that our values are likewise constructed through these choices. In Sartre’s philosophy, facticity represents the undeniable facts of one’s existence that cannot be changed or ignored. Existentialists emphasize that individuals must confront and take responsibility for their facticity. In other words, within the realm of freedom, individuals can transcend their facticity and create their own subjective meaning and purpose in life.

4.2. Radical Freedom & Responsibility

Existentialists view freedom as an inherent and valuable aspect of the human condition. According to Jean-Paul Sartre, freedom is synonymous with existence and individuals are not only free but also condemned to be free (Flynn, 2009; Sartre & Mairret, 1960). This infinite freedom carries with it a profound sense of responsibility. Since external factors do not compel individuals to act in a particular way, they are entirely responsible for the consequences of their actions. This radical freedom encompasses both positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, individuals have the autonomy to determine how they want to live. On the negative side, individuals are perpetually faced with the obligation to make choices, even if that choice is to do nothing and to assume responsibility for those choices. This is why Sartre argues that individuals are “condemned to be free”; the one thing individuals cannot choose is to have no choices at all.

4.3. Individualism & Humanism

Existentialism is an individualistic philosophy where the notion of being an individual is seen as an accomplishment rather than a given starting point within a mass society. Jean-Paul Sartre argues that existentialism is a humanistic philosophy that places the human being at the forefront of its focus and values. He suggests that the ultimate goal and highest value should involve promoting the individual's freedom, thereby enhancing their concrete range of choices (Flynn, 2009). Sartre highlights the importance of creative freedom, which should not be sacrificed for any supposedly superior value, whether it be the class concept of Marxists or the religious notion of God. This aligns with Nietzsche's concept of free spirits in his work "Human, All Too Human". Sartre contends that the shared human condition is the true universal aspect of humanity rather than a collective set of inherent traits that define individuals. According to Sartre, the essence of the human condition lies in each person's need to engage with the world (Flynn, 2017).

Consequently, existentialism emphasizes the significance of the individual within a mass society. It places human beings at the center of attention, prioritizing fostering individual freedom and recognizing the shared human condition. Existentialism challenges conventional notions of both collective identity and intrinsic human nature by affirming the importance of creative freedom and emphasizing internal sources of value.

4.4. Egalitarianism & Humanism

Sartre was, at heart, a political anarchist in the sense that he believed all relationships should be voluntary and egalitarian. He described authority as "the other in us" and was suspicious of all its forms (Detmer, 1988; Sartre & Maitre, 1960). As the horrors of World War II reverberated through society, existentialism proposed that war had demonstrated that no higher authority was holding us down. Instead, each individual was solely responsible for themselves and free to choose their own path. Sartre argues that there is no collective set of traits that "define" being human, other than that each must necessarily be in the world, work in it, live in it and possibly, die there.

4.5. Authenticity

Authenticity refers to the extent to which individuals remain true to their own lives despite external influences or pressures. Living an authentic life entail aligning one's actions with the core truth of their identity as both human beings and members of society. Realizing freedom, responsibility and individuality is crucial in cultivating authenticity (Aho, 2014; Santoni, 2010). In existential philosophy, the absence of authenticity, termed "bad faith" (*mauvaise foi*), is considered undesirable. Authenticity involves a person directly confronting reality and acknowledging the challenging truth that they are constantly free and can never fully coincide with their own self. In his War Diaries, Sartre asserts that authenticity lies in embracing human reality as one's own. Heidegger also defined an authentic man as one who escaped from the banality of everyday existence by recognizing his finitude and courageously facing death (Reynolds, 2014). Therefore, according to existential philosophy, individuals can genuinely transform their thoughts and emotions by adopting new beliefs, taking proactive actions, asserting their willpower instead of being passively influenced by circumstances and assuming responsibility for their own self-creation and behavior. Existentialism is a unique philosophical approach

that places significant emphasis on human existence and the distinctive qualities inherent in individuals.

4.6. Atheism & Abandonment

Sartre's search for a new way of thinking about the value of human life is primarily a response to the decline of religion in the modern world. Sartre is explicit about his atheism and believes humans create morality for their own ends rather than receiving it from a supernatural source (Aho, 2014). As such, he suggests that people are abandoned to the world and he thinks that whether people choose to acknowledge this or hide from it, the human condition is shaped by this abandonment. The consequence of abandonment is that the existentialist view of life must include despair or the denial of irrational hope. Because according to Sartre, there is no rational basis for believing that one will be saved by God or by the inherent goodwill of human nature. Sartre argues that it makes little sense to speculate on the qualities or effects of things we have no idea. Instead, he says, "I have to limit myself to what I can see". This does not mean that one should not want or try to succeed in one's actions, but rather that one should always take into account that no amount of effort guarantees success; no one ever has complete control over a scenario or can know for sure what will happen in the future. His critique of Enlightenment atheists makes it clear that, for Sartre, simply rejecting God does not mean that one has truly recognized human freedom. The difference between Enlightenment atheists and Sartre's constantly atheistic view is that he denies irrational hope (Sartre & Mairret, 1960).

4.7. Human-Centered and Contingent Ethics

During the late 18th century, Enlightenment thinkers such as Diderot, Voltaire and even Kant aimed to establish a foundation for morality based on human beings themselves rather than relying on God's commands. However, they pursued this by seeking a universal human nature that could replace God as the source of morality and behavior. Sartre argues that this approach is just as arbitrary as worshiping an invisible and unverifiable deity. In the early 20th century, thinkers like Marx, Freud and particularly Nietzsche began proposing that morality was not absolute but somewhat influenced by the historical context (Flynn, 2017). As philosophers recognized the arbitrary changes in moral norms, often serving the interests of the powerful throughout history, it became increasingly difficult to conceive morality as a fixed set of rules regarding right and wrong conduct. Nietzsche famously proclaimed the obsolescence of religious morality with the statement, "God is dead" and this "death" forms the backdrop of Sartre's entire philosophy (Moore, 2002). While Dostoyevsky suggests that belief in God is necessary for having morals by stating, "if God does not exist, everything is permissible" (Metz, 2000), Sartre accepts the absence of God and the resulting permissibility of everything. Embracing this abandonment does not imply that all actions should be allowed, but rather, without an all-powerful being to pass judgment on individuals, morality is revealed as a purely human creation. In the existentialist perspective defined initially by Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre, the ethical theory asserts that we should consider the freedom inherent in human existence as intrinsically valuable and the basis for all other values (De Beauvoir, 1989; Sartre, 1956). At the core of Sartre's ethical framework lies the concept of radical freedom, emphasizing that human beings are accountable for constructing their moral values and determining their actions (Howells, 2009). Within Sartre's ethical framework, moral judgments are

“subjective” and “contingent upon the situation”. There are no universal moral principles or rules to guide ethical decision-making. Instead, individuals must continually reflect, examine and develop self-awareness to establish their own moral values and assess the ethical implications of their actions in specific circumstances.

4.8. Absurdity

The concept of “absurdity” implies that life's meaning is solely derived from the meaning we assign to it. Existential philosophers argue that while life may be absurd and devoid of inherent meaning, we have the responsibility to make sense of it and give it significance. Existentialism proposes that life is filled with countless opportunities and possibilities, despite the inherent chaos and absurdity. While Nihilism suggests that life is meaningless and pointless, existentialists argue that realizing life's absurdity should serve as a starting point rather than an end. Albert Camus emphasizes that acknowledging life's absurdity is merely the beginning of our journey (Flynn, 2017; Hall, 1960).

The notion of absurdity, a central existential idea, can be understood differently. Firstly, existentialists argue that nature lacks a design or reason for its existence. While scientific or metaphysical explanations can describe the natural world, they do not provide understanding or meaning. Although natural sciences can explain the physical world, the achievements of natural sciences strip nature of value and meaning. Unlike a created cosmos, the scientifically described universe does not answer questions concerning value or meaning. Humans should sincerely acknowledge this lack of reason and the impossibility of fully understanding it (Flynn, 2017; Hall, 1960).

Secondly, absurdity is closely related to the theme of human freedom. From the perspective of reason and knowledge, our freedom appears absurd because it cannot be determined or constrained. This aligns with the idea of “being on its own”, which is associated with feelings of anxiety. Even if we choose to follow self-imposed laws, our choices and actions may seem absurd in the eyes of reason. The continuous reaffirmation of our choices and adherence to self-imposed laws can be seen as absurd. Thirdly, existentialists argue that human existence as action is inevitably self-destructive. Once a free action is performed, it loses its freedom and becomes a part of the world, a thing. The absurdity of human existence lies in the paradox that while striving to become our authentic selves (free existence), we are forced to be what we are not (a thing). Failure to confront this absurdity and opting to live inauthentically leads to an existence devoid of true meaning.

4.9. Anguish

Anguish, anxiety, dread and uneasiness are significant aspects of existential philosophy. It is characterized by a feeling of unease that arises when one begins to recognize the absurdity of life. This emotional state is commonly observed among existentialist thinkers and is generally understood as a negative response to the experience of human freedom and responsibility (Aho, 2014; Crowell, 2012). The awareness of one's limitless freedom can serve as a source of anxiety or anguish. Our inherent freedom becomes anxiety-inducing because no external constraints prevent us from engaging in dangerous, destructive, embarrassing or disreputable actions at any given moment. Therefore, the act of making choices and decisions can sometimes evoke anguish. Kierkegaard aptly stated, “Human beings enjoy a freedom of choice that we find both appealing and terrifying”. Sartre argued that humans are forlorn, emphasizing the absence

of guidance or assistance from transcendence. According to him, humans are trapped in their sense of freedom and this sense of freedom leads to conditions of forlornness. In such circumstances, no one can alleviate the pain of loneliness and isolation.

Within the existentialist framework, anxiety arises from the absence of external sources of value and determination. Individuals face the responsibility of choosing their own nature and values, which entails the immense burden of determining human nature and values for all individuals through their free choices.

5. Analysis

The nine tenets of Sartre's existentialism seem to coincide with socioeconomic development and the ensuing modern cultural values. Furthermore, the tenets of existentialism seem incompatible with lower levels of socioeconomic development and traditional cultural values. In the following sections, we analyze the (in)compatibility of existentialism with traditional/modern cultural values.

1. Existence Precedes Essence

In traditional societies, individuals' lives are occupied by the community and they are often assigned predetermined roles and identities based on their kinship, gender and social status (Inglehart, 1997; Inglehart & Welzel, 2010). Furthermore, in underdeveloped and traditional societies, people are often subjugated to the forces of nature and the environment. On the contrary, modernization is characterized by human mastery and control over nature (Wagner, 2004). As the byproducts of modernization, science and technology help humans gain control, predict, manipulate and re-invent the world. As societies progress economically and socially, they gain control over nature, environment and life and they shift from predetermined roles and societal expectations to a greater emphasis on personal autonomy and self-determination (Inglehart, 1997). This shift allows individuals to shape their own identities and define their purposes in life based on their lived experiences and choices. In economically developed and modern societies, there is an emphasis on individual autonomy and self-determination, where individuals are encouraged to build their own identities. The identity building aligns with Sartre's tenet that existence precedes essence, as it emphasizes the capacity of humans to create their own meanings and essence, free from predetermined roles or expectations. In other words, Sartre's assertion that existence precedes essence challenges the essentialism of traditional and agrarian societies.

Therefore, we propose:

Proposition-1: Sartre's existentialist tenet that 'existence precedes essence' aligns with the trajectory of socioeconomic development and the ensuing modern cultural values.

2. Freedom and Responsibility

Developing economies and traditional societies tend to emphasize communal obligations and conformity to established norms and traditions. As societies develop economically, there is often an expansion of personal freedoms, civil liberties and democratic governance. According to Modernization theory, democracy and freedom are the outcomes of the modernization process (Inglehart, 1997; Inglehart & Welzel, 2010). With human development, people can exercise their rights, participate in decision-making processes and express their opinions without fear of repression or social sanctions. Thus, individuals are empowered to pursue self-expression, personal autonomy and the realization of their own aspirations. In turn, the prevalence of Inglehart's modern values can reinforce and support continued socioeconomic development by promoting

entrepreneurship, innovation and the exercise of private ownership. This feature resonates with Sartre's tenet of freedom and responsibility, which asserts that individuals have the freedom to make choices and are accountable for the consequences of their actions.

Therefore, we propose:

Proposition-2: Sartre's existentialist freedom and responsibility align with the trajectory of socioeconomic development and the ensuing modern cultural values.

3. Individualism

Empirical research suggests that agrarian, developing and traditional societies are often collectivistic and strongly emphasize communal identity and group solidarity (Bell, 1973; 1976; Hofstede, 2011). This attitude is understandable because collectivism can arise in low socioeconomic development settings as a response to resource scarcity and economic adversity (Hofstede, 2011; House *et al.*, 2004). By contrast, economic development gives people more choices and opportunities, allowing them to pursue personal aspirations, accumulate wealth and exercise greater autonomy in decision-making. As a result, individualism can gain prominence as a cultural value in economically developed societies. Numerous studies based on the World Value Survey (Inglehart *et al.*, 2000) indicate that agrarian, developing and traditional societies are highly collectivistic, but industrial/post-industrial, developed and modern cultures are individualistic. Sartre's existentialism is an individualistic philosophy that uses phenomenological concepts to analyze human existence (Thompson & Pascal, 2011; Webber, 2018). In existentialism, being an individual is seen as an accomplishment rather than a given starting point within a mass society (Plantinga, 1983). Sartre suggests that the ultimate goal and highest value should revolve around promoting the individual's freedom, thereby enhancing their concrete range of choices (Längle, 2004).

Therefore, we propose:

Proposition-3: Sartre's existentialist individualism tenet aligns with the trajectory of socioeconomic development and the ensuing modern cultural values.

4. Egalitarianism and Humanism

Under developed economies feel economic insecurity, social instability and physical threats; consequently, they prioritize immediate self-interest and close parties, including family, tribe and community. According to Inglehart (1997), traditional cultural values tend to be intolerant of outgroups, such as strangers, women and homosexuals and rank relatively low on interpersonal trust. Furthermore, under-developed economies and traditional societies are marked by hierarchical structures, caste systems and unequal power distribution (Bell, 1976). Many empirical studies report that the lower levels of GDP per capita are strongly correlated with high power distance, gender gap and intolerance of minorities (Yeganeh, 2021). Moreover, traditional and developing economies are often collectivistic (House *et al.*, 2004; Inglehart, 1997; Yeganeh, 2021) and for that reason, prioritize collective well-being over individual rights and equality. By contrast, socioeconomic development often entails improvements in education, healthcare and access to resources, contributing to promoting egalitarian principles. According to the World Values Surveys (Inglehart *et al.*, 2000), as societies develop, there is increasing recognition of every individual's intrinsic worth and dignity, fostering a commitment to humanism. As societies attain higher levels of socioeconomic development, living standards improve, survival threats are weakened and modern cultural values, including tolerance, openness and egalitarianism, become more prevalent. In other words, human development and the ensuing modern cultural values resonate with

Sartre's humanistic perspective, underscoring each individual's intrinsic value and dignity.

Based on the above discussion, we propose:

Proposition-4: Sartre's existentialist humanism and egalitarianism align with the trajectory of socioeconomic development and the ensuing modern cultural values.

5. Authenticity

Sartre's existentialist philosophy emphasizes the significance of living authentically and aligning one's actions with personal values and beliefs. Inglehart's modern cultural values theory also recognizes self-expression as a crucial element of post-materialist values. Socioeconomic development offers individuals the necessary resources and opportunities to express their authentic selves and pursue personal fulfillment. As societies progress economically, individuals are afforded greater agency in manifesting their authentic identities and aspirations, aligning with both Sartre's existentialist tenets and Inglehart's modern cultural values. In other words, existentialist authenticity can be seen as an outcome of socioeconomic development that is congruent with Inglehart's modern cultural values.

Therefore, we propose:

Proposition-5: Sartre's existentialist authenticity tenet aligns with the trajectory of socioeconomic development and the ensuing modern cultural values.

6. Atheism and Abandonment

According to Inglehart (1997), religion plays a central role in developing economies and traditional societies, providing a framework for belief systems, values and social cohesion. As societies develop and become more diverse, the influence of traditional religious institutions may decline. This shift toward secularism allows individuals to question and form their own beliefs, embracing a more personal and skeptical approach to spirituality and meaning-making. Inglehart's modernization theory emphasizes the rise of secularity and rationality as dominant cultural values in developed societies. This shift is often associated with socioeconomic development as education levels rise and material conditions improve. Sartre's existentialist tenets, emphasizing atheism and human-centered ethics, resonate with the increasing secularization observed in developed societies. The rejection of religious authority and the primacy of reason and critical thinking align with Inglehart's focus on rationality and Sartre's existentialist principles. As societies progress economically and educationally, a trend towards secularization and rationality emerges, fostering compatibility between Sartre's atheistic and human-centered philosophy and Inglehart's modern cultural values.

Therefore, we propose:

Proposition-6: Sartre's existentialist atheism and abandonment tenet aligns with the trajectory of socioeconomic development and the ensuing modern cultural values.

7. Human-Centered and Relative Ethics

Traditional societies often have a set of moral and ethical principles that are rooted in religious teachings and civilizational traditions. As societies modernize, they tend to emphasize human-centered ethics that prioritize human well-being, utilitarianism, individual rights and social justice. This attitude aligns with Sartre's existentialist perspective, which places the individual at the center of ethical decision-making, recognizes the subjective and relative nature of ethics and challenges the notion of a universally applicable moral framework. Existentialism suggests that there are no a priori answers to ethical and moral questions; instead, there are only the answers that each of us will choose (Kalderimis, 2010).

Therefore, we propose:

Proposition-7: Sartre's existentialist human-centered and contingent ethics tenet aligns with the trajectory of socioeconomic development and the ensuing modern cultural values.

8. Absurdity

Traditional societies often seek meaning and purpose in life through religious beliefs, adherence to transcendent ideas and defining spiritual or immaterial beings. As societies undergo socioeconomic development, they attach more importance to natural and material objects, pragmatism, applicable science and technology, worldly happiness, consumption and possession. Notably, modern science has embraced a positivistic tendency of science after the Enlightenment in search of testable or falsifiable mechanistic theories. In modern societies, there is a widespread acknowledgment of the inherent existential absurdity and lack of ultimate meaning in life. Similarly, Sartre's notion of absurdity, which highlights the inherent lack of ultimate meaning in human existence, challenges the traditional pursuit of meaning through religious and spiritual ideas. This recognition implies that individuals must confront and navigate the uncertainty and ambiguity of human existence.

Therefore, we propose:

Proposition-8: Sartre's existentialist absurdity tenet aligns with the trajectory of socioeconomic development and the ensuing modern cultural values.

9. Anguish

Traditional societies often provide individuals with a sense of belonging and identity through communal ties and adherence to established religious and spiritual ideas of salvation. Inglehart's modernization theory acknowledges that socioeconomic development and the ensuing modernization involve materialism, abandonment of transcendental and in the language of Max Weber, disenchantment (Carroll, 2011). As societies progress economically, the reevaluation of values and the renegotiation of existential concerns become more prevalent, resulting in increased anguish and unease. Modern societies like Sartre's existentialism acknowledge the existential anguish that arises from confronting freedom, responsibility, abandonment, despair, absurdity and the search for meaning.

Therefore, we propose:

Proposition-9: Sartre's existentialist anguish tenet aligns with the trajectory of socioeconomic development and the ensuing modern cultural values.

6. Discussion & Conclusion

This paper analyzed the congruence between Inglehart's modern cultural values and Sartre's existentialist tenets. Inglehart's modernization theory is based on extensive empirical research since the 1970s, while existentialism is a philosophical school formed in the 19th century and became popular with Sartre's publications in the 1940s. Despite different origins and approaches, there are significant parallels between Sartre's existentialist tenets, socioeconomic development and Inglehart's modern cultural values (Table 1). The alignment arises from their shared focus on anti-essentialism, individual autonomy, human rights, the pursuit of personal fulfillment, secularity, rationality, autonomy and self-expression, often the outcomes of socioeconomic development.

Sartre's existentialism places a central focus on the concept of individual freedom. According to Sartre, individuals possess a fundamental freedom to choose their actions and shape their lives. This notion aligns with Inglehart's modern cultural values, as his

theory acknowledges the increasing importance of individual autonomy and self-expression in societies transitioning towards economic development and modern cultural values. In other words, both Sartre and Inglehart recognize the significance of individuals' agency in determining their own paths and making choices that reflect their personal values.

Inglehart's traditional cultural values, such as religiosity, conservatism and adherence to tradition, may conflict with certain aspects of Sartre's existentialist tenets. Traditional societies often prioritize religious beliefs, adherence to social norms and maintaining hierarchical structures. This attitude can be at odds with existentialist ideas emphasizing individual freedom, authenticity and rejecting predetermined roles. Traditional cultural values may discourage individuals from questioning established beliefs and norms, limiting their ability to embrace the existentialist principles of personal freedom and self-determination fully. Likewise, socioeconomic underdevelopment, characterized by low GDP, low Human Development Index (HDI) and limited access to education, is incompatible with modern cultural values and can hinder the realization of Sartre's existentialist tenets (Table 1). In societies where basic needs and survival are primary concerns, the pursuit of existentialist ideas such as authenticity and individualism may be overshadowed by socioeconomic deprivation. In such circumstances, individuals may have limited resources and opportunities to explore their personal authenticity, freedom and self-expression.

Both Sartre and Inglehart's modernization theory recognize the human experience's subjectivity and cultural contexts' influence. Sartre's existentialism emphasizes the subjective nature of existence, asserting that each individual's perception and interpretation shape their reality. Inglehart's theory also acknowledges cross-cultural variations in values, emphasizing that different societies prioritize and value certain aspects of life differently based on their historical, economic and cultural contexts.

The existentialists argue that our purpose and meaning in life come not from transcendental forces but are entirely determined by ourselves. Therefore, they do not consider any telos or ultimate purpose in life, hence considering life as an “absurd” project that is ultimately irrational but should be defined on an individual path towards a higher purpose. The negation of transcendence, absurdity or what Max Weber labeled disenchantment, is both the cause and the consequence of socioeconomic development (Carroll, 2011). Weber argued that in pre-modern societies, there was an enchantment of transcendental forces that gave way to secular, rational, bureaucratic and scientific forces with the rise of modernity and socioeconomic development. Weber's disenchantment or the existentialist's absurdity brings about many positive advancements, such as scientific progress, technological innovation and increased efficiency. Nevertheless, it leads to a loss of meaning, a feeling of emptiness and a sense of alienation from the world. The notion of disenchantment means that individuals' lives were increasingly shaped by rational calculation and instrumental reasoning rather than by transcendental meaning, ultimate purpose and communal values. Transcendence is a remedy, a postponement, if not a solution to life's problems, including poverty, incapability and death.

As shown in Table 1, other salient themes of existentialism, including humanism, egalitarianism, gender equality, tolerance, absurdity and anguish, can be understood as the consequences of socioeconomic development and subsequent cultural modernization. For instance, with socioeconomic development, industrialization, the expansion of international business and the advancement of telecommunication and transportation, there is a rising contact among different ethnicities, religions and races. To do business

globally, dealing, negotiating and working with other ethnicities and races is imperative. Global capitalism perceives people as “humans” or as workers and consumers devoid of their familial, racial, ethnic and religious connections. Likewise, as economies become more sophisticated and move from agrarian to manufacturing and service-based sectors, they focus on gaining productivity that can be obtained by employing women and minorities. That can explain why modern capitalistic economies promote gender equality, feminism and diversity in the workplace. Anguish and absurdity are recurring themes in modern capitalism that are often associated with consumerism, productivity and financial gain. Modern capitalism constantly promotes the desire for new products and experiences. This constant pursuit of consumption can lead to a sense of never-ending longing and desire for material possessions.

According to Inglehart (1997), modern cultural values are characterized by acceptance and tolerance of divorce, abortion, euthanasia, suicide and homosexuality. While existentialism, as a philosophical movement, does not explicitly address such issues, it has contributed to the intellectual underpinnings that have supported the rise of divorce, abortion, euthanasia, suicide and homosexuality. For instance, existentialism strongly emphasizes individual authenticity and self-expression and argues that individuals should have the freedom to define and live their lives according to their own values and desires. Existentialism challenges the idea of fixed and essential human nature and argues that God does not create individuals and thus is free to decide about their identity, sexuality, abortion and even terminating their lives. Existentialism opposes societal norms, conventions and expectations that can limit individual freedom and authenticity. Both existentialist tenets and modern cultural values lead to increasing levels of tolerance, liberalism and even laxism at individual, social and political levels.

While there are congruent elements between Sartre's existentialism and Inglehart's modern cultural values, it is important to note that they approach the subject from different angles. Sartre's existentialism focuses on the individual's existential freedom and responsibility, while Inglehart's Modernization theory explores societal shifts in values and their impact on collective behavior. Sartre's existentialism emphasizes the individual's existential freedom and responsibility, whereas Inglehart's Modernization theory investigates societal transformations in values and their repercussions on collective behavior. Sartre's existentialism is a popular philosophy expressed in ambiguous, symbolic and exaggerated language, but Inglehart's Modernization theory relies on empirical investigation and emphasizes clarity and precision. For instance, Sartre's expression “man has no essence” is an exaggeration and should be interpreted as “the modern man can to some extent change his essence”.

Nevertheless, both perspectives contribute to our comprehension of human agency, individualism, self-expression, egalitarianism, instrumental rationality, human-centered ethics and humans' evolving 'nature' in the contemporary world. Given the considerable congruence between these two frameworks, we propose that the rise in popularity of existentialism can largely be attributed to the socioeconomic development in Western societies and the subsequent emergence of modern cultural values after the industrial revolution. Therefore, it is possible to suggest that existentialism is not merely an abstract or logical philosophical school but is a popular movement associated with socioeconomic conditions. In addition to theoretical implications, the congruence of existentialism and Modernization theory carries critical practical ramifications. The two perspectives can explain much of the socio-cultural transformations in the contemporary world including the rise of gender equality, abortion, divorce, euthanasia, homosexuality,

refugees' and minorities' rights, inclusiveness, genetic engineering, trans-humanism and utilitarian ethics. Despite their radical formulations, many tenets of existentialism, particularly anti-essentialism and human agency, seem applicable to various domains of modern social life, including business, organization, education and politics.

Table 1. Correspondence and congruence between existentialism, development and modernization

Existentialism		Modernization
Existentialist Tenets	Meanings and Implications	Socioeconomic Development
		Modern Cultural Values
1. Existence Precedes Essence	Every human builds their own essence.	Development Measures: Industrialization Moving from agrarian to manufacturing and service economy Higher GDP/Cap Higher HDI Higher Literacy and Education Longer Life Expectancy Lower Birth Rates Rationality/Secularity Self-Expression Mastery of nature Scientific and technological advancement Rationality Individualism The decreasing importance of the transcendent and the spiritual Egalitarianism Intellectual autonomy Affective autonomy Utilitarian and consequentialist ethics Tolerance to abortion, divorce, homosexuality, euthanasia and suicide Participation in the political process and democratic transition
2. Radical Freedom & Responsibility	Human is condemned to be free.	
3. Individualism & Humanism	The human being is individually at the center of attention.	
4. Egalitarianism & Humanism	All relationships should be voluntary and egalitarian.	
5. Authenticity	Remain true to own lives despite external pressures.	
6. Atheism & Abandonment	There is no rational basis for believing that one will be saved by God.	
7. Human Centered and Relative Ethics	Moral judgments are subjective and contingent upon the situation.	
8. Absurdity	Life has no inherent meaning except for what we assign to it.	
9. Anguish	A feeling of unease arises when one begins to recognize the absurdity of life.	

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