



The Death of God in Sartre's *The Flies*

Malek J. Zuraikat* and Sarah Mashreqi

Department of English, Yarmouk University, Shafiq Irshidat st., Irbid, Jordan. *Author for correspondence. E-mail: m.zuraikat@yu.edu.jo

ABSTRACT. The death of god, which refers to the absence of god's value, weight, significance, and role from people's life experience, is among the most dominant themes of existential literature, especially that of Sartre. It is heavily investigated in his theoretical as well as creative works, such as *Being and Nothingness* (1969) and *The Flies* (1989) as it constitutes the cornerstone of his philosophical views of Existentialism, nihilism, freedom, and responsibility. It is hard to understand Sartre's *The Flies* (1989) and its philosophical background as well as theme(s) without considering the concept of the death of god and its involvement in the development of actions. Accordingly, this paper reads *The Flies* (1989) investigating Sartre's techniques of introducing and contending that god is dead and has nothing to do with people's life or prosperity. Considering the related literature and the different perspectives of Nietzsche and Hegel regarding Existentialism, the paper deciphers certain scenes and speeches delivered by several characters, such as Zeus, Orestes, and Electra, and it concludes that Sartre's *The Flies* (1989) shows how the belief in the death of god may function as a productive force in humans' life and existence. Thus, the paper may help readers of Sartre better understand the existential mechanism of the death of god and comprehend why Sartre's Existentialism is to be viewed as an optimistic, rather than pessimistic, approach.

Keywords: death of god; drama; existentialism; literary criticism; *The Flies*; Sartre.

A morte de Deus em *As moscas* de Sartre

RESUMO. A morte de deus, que se refere à ausência de valor, peso, significado e papel de deus na experiência de vida das pessoas, está entre os temas mais dominantes da literatura existencial, especialmente a de Sartre. É fortemente investigada em seus trabalhos teóricos e criativos, como em *Ser e nada* (1969) e *As moscas* (1989), pois constitui a pedra angular de suas visões filosóficas do existencialismo, niilismo, liberdade e responsabilidade. É difícil entender *As moscas*, de Sartre (1989), e seu pano de fundo filosófico, bem como o(s) tema(s), sem considerar o conceito da morte de deus e seu envolvimento no desenvolvimento das ações. Consequentemente, este artigo lê *As Moscas* (1989) investigando as técnicas de Sartre para apresentar e argumentar que deus está morto e não tem nada a ver com a vida ou prosperidade das pessoas. Considerando a literatura relacionada e as diferentes perspectivas de Nietzsche e Hegel a respeito do existencialismo, o artigo decifra certas cenas e discursos proferidos por vários personagens, como Zeus, Orestes e Electra, e conclui que a peça *As Moscas* mostra como a crença na morte de deus pode funcionar como uma força produtiva na vida dos humanos e existência. Assim, o artigo pode ajudar os leitores de Sartre a entender melhor o mecanismo existencial da morte de Deus e a compreender por que seu existencialismo deve ser visto como uma abordagem otimista, em vez de pessimista.

Palavras-chave: morte de deus; drama; existencialismo; crítica literária; *As moscas*; Sartre.

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Introduction

Existentialism is concerned with the existence of individuals: what they choose, how they act, and what they make of themselves. Such an emphasis on humans indicates the absence of the role of god, something that Existentialists call 'the death of god'. Existentialism focuses on humans and ignores god, which suggests that the existential belief in the nonexistence of god does not necessarily stem from atheism. While some Existentialists do not believe in the existence of a divine being that has created all other beings and that is able to control all creatures, others like Sartre do not completely deny the existence of god as a creator but believe he does not have roles to play in people's lives anymore. This implies that the idea of the death of god is associated with the loss of life's meaning considering that life's meanings and values are

derived from god's rules. To better understand the validity as well as implications of this claim, our paper investigates the notion of the death of god in Sartre's *The Flies* (1989) emphasizing how the play introduces the manifestations of the death of god by displaying certain scenes in which gods have nothing to do with people's life or prosperity.

This paper consults with Hegel and Nietzsche's conceptions of the death of god considering that their views have heavily influenced those of Sartre. Moreover, the paper consults with Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1969), which expresses Sartre's philosophical point of view regarding humans' existence. To this end, the paper is divided into four sections: introduction, philosophical background and related literature, discussion, and conclusion. The second section aims at contextualizing Sartre's notion of the death of god in terms of the philosophical viewpoints of Hegel and Nietzsche. The third section reads Sartre's *The Flies* (1989) considering the philosophical context summarized in the second section as well as Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1969). Finally, the conclusion summarizes the paper and stresses that Sartre's belief in the death of god involves the philosopher's optimistic viewpoint that humans are free and should never be waiting for god to interfere.

Philosophical background and related literature

The notion of the death of god has been discussed by Hegel before Nietzsche and Sartre; therefore, understanding the viewpoints of Nietzsche and Sartre in this regard demands contemplating Hegel's belief that god is not a being and therefore should not be characterized as the greatest, the most omniscient, or the wisest. Such traits –no matter how they may aggrandize and glorify the image of god– introduce god as a being, which is not sensical. Reporting this Hegelian viewpoint, Robert M. Wallace (2011a) says,

If god were a being, there would be other beings alongside god, presumably many of them are much smaller and less glorious and less powerful. But still independent beings exist separate from god or alongside god, as it were. And then, if that were the case, god, Hegel suggests, would be limited.

According to Wallace (2011a), Hegel believes that “[...] god is the process of self-determination”. This indicates that god is not separated from us; yet, god is not us. Moreover, “Hegel’s God is omnipresent in the world, giving each of us the full reality and thus the blessedness of which we’re capable [...]”, considering that this guiding power “[...] emerges out of beings of limited reality, including ourselves” (Wallace, 2011b). Hegel’s god is not a being that is higher than other beings; it is what guides humans towards their self-determination. Therefore, the full reality, which is god, emerges when a human determines who s/he is.

For Hegel, god does not exist; what exists rather is our feelings that are associated with god. Therefore, the death of god is basically the death of the feelings related to god. In *Faith and Knowledge*, Hegel (1977, p. 266) writes,

The pure concept, however, or infinity, as the abyss of nothingness in which all being sinks, must characterize the infinite pain, which previously was only in culture historically and as the feeling on which rests modern religion, the feeling that God Himself is dead, (the feeling which was uttered by Pascal, though only empirically, in his saying: Nature is such that it marks everywhere, both in and outside of man, a lost God), purely as a phase, but also as no more than just a phase, of the highest idea.

Hegel here does not only claim that god is dead, but he also emphasizes that realizing that god is dead leads to nothingness, which is the opposite of existence considering that nothingness, though it is identical to being, can cause pain to humans who will eventually lose interest in life after knowing that it is meaningless.

Similarly, Nietzsche has tackled the death of god explicitly, and his viewpoints can be taken in figuratively and literally. From a figurative perspective, the death of god is attributed to enlightenment and its inevitable reverberations. In *the Gay Science*, Nietzsche (2013b, p. 120) states, “God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him”. This suggests that humans and their enlightenment are responsible for annihilating the belief in god's existence. The many sciences and inventions made by people have caused humanity to act as a being that is able to live without a divine power ruling over; consequently, the existence of the world has become dominated by scientific and rational explanations rather than myths or religious beliefs.

From a literal perspective, Nietzsche's concept of the death of god is associated with the Christian god. It is thought that the idea of the death of god has emerged due to the struggle between science and religion and that “[...] the challenge to God came less from science than from politics” (Malik, 2014). The spread of

wars, oppression, and enslavement has caused people to begin doubting religions' justice and to stop depending on conjectural beliefs and socioreligious norms when interpreting matters. Nietzsche explains that such norms do not apply to certain people as they are superior to norms; therefore, religion works for them as an ideology justifying the oppression imposed against those who are inferior to them. This explains why Nietzsche is against the Western culture that has been affected by the values and beliefs of Christianity, which he views as a self-destructive religion that holds humans back and prevents them from acting or discovering themselves. Nietzsche (2013a, p. 44) writes,

Christianity is called the religion of pity. Pity stands opposed to the tonic emotions which heighten our vitality! It has a depressing effect. We are deprived of strength when we feel pity. That loss of strength which suffering as such inflicts on life is still further increased and multiplied by pity. Pity makes suffering contagious. Under certain circumstances, it may engender a total loss of life and vitality out of all proportion to the magnitude of the cause.

Interestingly, the death of god for Nietzsche is both negative and positive at the same time. It can be negative for its damaging impacts on the lives of people and for its role in generating nihilism, which Nietzsche expects to be affecting future generations. However, this expectation is considered as a prophecy among several critics who believe that Nietzsche has been able to foresee what the coming generations will experience. In a lecture delivered at the University of London's International Programmes Open Evening, Professor Ken Gemes (2012) addresses Nietzsche's notions of the death of god and nihilism. He states that the belief in god for Nietzsche is "[...] the central guide to our life" (Gemes, 2012). When god is dead, we "[...] lose the foundation for everyday" (Gemes, 2012). He then adds, "[...] all the values that we have been based on [...]" depend on our belief in god (Gemes, 2012); therefore, "[...] when we get rid of god, we get rid of [the] fundamental basis [...]" of our life, which entails nihilism, that is "[...] the absence of all values" (Gemes, 2012). Due to such absence of values, people lose their interest in life and consequently experience pessimism and meaninglessness.

Nonetheless, the death of god for Nietzsche can be positive as it can simply free humans from life responsibilities. Nietzsche suggests, if god is the source of rules, values, and meaning and if nihilism emerges when god is dead, then humans become able to create their own rules and values out of nothing. Consequently, humans democratize themselves from the mega-narratives, such as the *Torah*, *Bible*, and *Qur'an*, which seek to manage life affairs and indirectly restrict humans' creativity or freedom. In *the Gay Science* (2013b), Nietzsche reports the story of a Madman who goes in the street saying:

God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him! How shall we console ourselves, the most murderous of all murderers? The holiest and the mightiest that the world has so far possessed, has bled to death under our knife, who will wipe the blood from us? With what water could we cleanse ourselves? What purifications, what sacred games shall we have to devise? Is not the magnitude of this deed too great for us? Shall we not ourselves have to become Gods, merely to seem worthy of it? There never was a greater event and on account of it, all who are born after us belong to a higher history than any history so far! (Nietzsche, 2013b p. 120).

This excerpt suggests two possible consequences of the death of god: first, people may get desperate; second, they may live freely. Wondering about the way people use to console themselves, the Madman points to the pain people encounter when god is dead due to consequent meaninglessness. Suggesting that people may become god(s), the speaker is indirectly saying that people can be free and can create their own values and rules after the death of god whose absence does result in the absence of his own values and rules.

Regarding Sartre, whose Existentialism is the topic of this paper, his notion of the death of god resembles Nietzsche's. Both do not deny the existence of god, the creator, but they deny the existence of the belief in god, in Nietzsche's terms, or the existence of the role of god, in Sartre's terms. Pointing out his belief in the non-existence of god in his interview with Beauvoir, Sartre recalls the few moments in which he felt the existence of god, the moments that have caused him to get the feeling of "[...] being subject to God's gaze" (Kirkpatrick, 2013, p. 3). Sartre's feeling here indirectly indicates the struggles people go through when knowing that there is a god, which is the feeling of being seen and observed all the time. While this seems in religion as a motivation for people to do what is considered 'good' and moral, it potentially seems for Sartre as a limitation for humans' activity and freedom. Considering that Sartre during that moment, as he says, "[...] was busy covering up [his] crime" (Sartre, 1981, p. 65), his momentary sensing of god's existence and ability to observe humans causes him to feel guilty or criminal.

However, he then recalls an incident he witnessed when he was still twelve years old. Sartre (apud Kirkpatrick, 2013, p. 160-161) says:

In the morning I used to take the tram with the girls next door [...] One day I was walking up and down outside their house for a few minutes waiting for them to get ready. I don't know where the thought came from or how it struck me, yet all at once I said to myself, 'God doesn't exist' [...]. As I remember very well, it was on that day and in the form of a momentary intuition that I said to myself, 'God does not exist'.

Although Sartre here expresses his denial of the existence of god, he does not give any kind of explanation of such a switch in perspective. Elaborating on how his belief in the absence of god has come unexpectedly. In *The Words*, Sartre (1981, p. 65) writes,

Once I had the feeling that He existed. I had been playing with matches and had burnt a mat; I was busy covering up my crime when suddenly God saw me. I felt His gaze inside my head and on my hands; I turned round and round in the bathroom, horribly visible, a living target. I was saved by indignation: I grew angry at such a crude lack of tact, and blasphemed, muttering like my grandfather: 'Sacré nom de Dieu de nom de Dieu de nom de Dieu'¹. He never looked at me again.

This excerpt reveals Sartre's belief in the absence of god and the consequences that can take place if he has thought otherwise as well. Sartre declares, "He never looked at me again [...]" (Sartre, 1981, p. 65), thus confirming his loss of the feeling of god's existence and significance.

Accordingly, Sartre's notion of the absence of god complies with Nietzsche's belief that believing in god's existence prevents people from acting freely, which may lead people to start depending on that higher power to conducting life businesses and responsibilities. This way humans will not feel responsible for what they do or think. Rather, they become fully reliant on god at the cost of their own abilities, dreams, wishes, and freedom. To better understand this, the following section scrutinizes Sartre's *The Flies* (1989) arguing that the playwright expresses his belief in the absence or death of god by introducing him as a simple character playing certain trivial roles or by marginalizing, sometimes ignoring, him completely.

Discussion

The Flies (1989) is Sartre's adaptation of the Electra myth. Incorporating several Greek names and figures, including gods, the play displays the theme of the death of god by introducing gods as inactive figures that have no serious tasks or roles to conduct at all. In this play, Sartre gives Zeus a role to perform, but that role has nothing to do with the existence and value of humans. Zeus, or Jupiter, is a very famous figure when it comes to strength, power, and authority. He is the god whose power is believed to be "[...] greater than that of all the other divinities together" (Hamilton & Savage, 1942, p. 24). In Berens's words,

Zeus, the great presiding deity of the universe, the ruler of heaven and earth, was regarded by the Greeks, first, as the god of all aerial phenomena; secondly, as the personification of the laws of nature; thirdly, as lord of state-life; and fourthly, as the father of gods and of men (Berens, 2009, p. 17).

Yet, Zeus is deprived of his prestigious power in Sartre's *The Flies* (1989), which reflects the author's belief in the death of god. In this play, Zeus is ironically assigned several tasks or roles that contradict with his classical roles and status. Berens (2009, p. 17) explains that Zeus is usually seen as the gods' father who "[...] sees that each deity performs his or her individual duty, punishes their misdeeds, settles their disputes, and acts towards them on all occasions as their all-knowing counselor and mighty friend". Also, he is involved in humans' actions by helping and rewarding them for their good deeds and "[...] severely punishing [them for] perjury, cruelty, and want of hospitality" (Berens, 2009, p. 18). Moreover, Zeus the Classic is the god who controls the occurrence of thunder and lightning. He is therefore the responsible entity for rain, life, sky, and earth.

On the contrary, Sartre's Zeus has nothing to do with that at all, and his roles and responsibilities are nothing to admire in comparison to the classical ones. In the first scene of *The Flies* (1989), in which Orestes and the Tutor first arrive to Argos, the latter notices a man with a beard, who is Zeus, and tells Orestes that man has been following them along the way. Orestes replies to the Tutor saying that the bearded man is probably a traveler like them. Either way, the word "traveler" is central to our argument here. Muhammad Yahya Cheema (2009) contends that the word 'traveler' is important for it can serve as a symbol of the absence of god's role and god's lack of control over humans. He writes,

¹ This French quote can be translated into English as 'Sacred name of God of name of God of name of God'. Sartre here is emphasizing his viewpoint that believing-in-god-based religions are monotonous and repetitive.

If god himself is a traveller just like others, then there remains no question of a predetermined nature or destiny. They will all have to find answers along the way, shaping their conscious beings, as they travel in this world (Cheema, 2009, p. 116).

Zeus is a traveler; therefore, he is like other travelers who do not control the conditions of their own adventures and who are always in a quest for something. This indicates that the travelers in this play, who represent humanity, are not controlled by god simply because god himself is travelling with them and is therefore vulnerable to several unpredictable conditions and events. The travelers are free to choose and determine what to do away from the will of god. In Cheema's words, "By presenting Zeus, the mightiest of gods in Greek mythology, on the stage as a character, Sartre emphasizes his notion of existence preceding the essence" (Cheema, 2009, p. 116). Sartre introduces Zeus in this scene as well as the rest of the play as a normal character rather than a supernatural power, which functions as a reference to Zeus's existential vulnerability and lack of control.

Noteworthy here that Zeus appears at the beginning of the play as omniscient and active as gods are expected to be, especially when trying to control and interrupt the occurrence of certain actions. Yet, the flow of actions proves that he is not able to really change anything. In the first scene, Orestes hides his identity and claims that his name is Philebus and that he is from Corinth. Talking to Zeus, Orestes behaves as if Zeus knows that Orestes is the son of the murdered king and that he is there to take revenge for his father. Nonetheless, Zeus fails to recognize him and says that if Orestes is alive, then he may come to Argos and ask for his right to rule the country. Thinking that he is talking to a guy at the same age of Orestes himself, Zeus explains that in case Orestes is alive and comes to the town of Argos one day, then "[...] [he] would say, 'my lad', as he's your age or thereabouts -- if he's alive, of course. By the way, young lord, may I know your name"? (Sartre, 1989, p. 61). Obviously, Sartre's Zeus lacks the classical god's trait of being all-knowing, for god in general is believed to know everything about humans as well as other creatures.

Another role that Sartre's Zeus does not have, in comparison to classical Zeus, is the role of rewarding good deeds and punishing bad ones. In *The Flies* (1989), Sartre's Zeus knows very well that Agamemnon is killed by his wife and her lover, but he does nothing to punish them or to support Orestes when he decides to punish the murderers himself or take revenge. Instead, Zeus causes all people of Argos to bear the responsibility of the murder, which leads them to live in repentance for what is not their fault and suffer from the flies that fill the air. He even makes a special day for the dead in which the dead are thought to come to life again. Zeus explains what happens on that day to Orestes saying: "Lest they forget the screams of the late king in his last agony, [people] keep this festival of death each year when the day of the king's death comes around. A herdsman from the hills [...] is set to bellow in the Great Hall of the palace" (Sartre, 1989, p. 57). Zeus realizes the bleak life of Argos people caused by the sin committed by two of them, but he does nothing to stop people's suffering and continues enjoying their repentance.

Sartre's Zeus does not only avoid taking actions to punish the murderers whose crime has caused Argos people to suffer, but he also denies people the right to resolve that problem. In the second scene where the ceremony of the dead begins, Electra appears dressed in white while other people appear dressed in black. The girl tries to convince the townspeople that the dead are not attending the gathering as thought to be and that they are neither angry with people nor can hurt anyone. Then she starts dancing and people begin to get affected by her. Zeus stops her saying:

This is too much. I'll shut that foolish wench's tongue. [Stretches out his right arm.] Poseidon, caribou, caribou, roola. [The big stone which blocked the entrance to the cavern rumbles across the stage and crashes against the temple steps. Electra stops dancing] (Sartre, 1989, p. 84).

Considering "[...] the mumbo-jumbo incantation ['Poseidon, caribou, caribou, roola']" (Roberts & Reid, 2017) used by Zeus to control the rock, the flow of actions throughout the play testifies that Sartre's Zeus is not interested in defending goodness or freeing the people of Argos from their misunderstanding of that gathering. Instead, he aborts Electra's attempt to save her own townspeople from such hallucinations.

Yet, Zeus's apparent success here does not testify to the god's active role in the flow of actions. It is significant to emphasize here that before Zeus' interval with actions, Electra decides to act in accordance with what her townspeople believe and therefore she has kept asking her dead, her elder sister and father, to give her a sign whenever she is wrong. She says,

Hear my prayer. If I am an evil-doer, if I offend your sorrowing shades, make some sign that I may know. But, if, my dear ones, you approve, let no leaf stir, no blade of grass be moved, and no sound break in on my sacred dance (Sartre, 1989, p. 83).

This suggests that Electra and her people have been obedient to any sign made by their dead rather than Zeus, which is evident also in the high priest's comment on the incident: "[...] the dead avenge themselves" (Sartre, 1989, p. 84). In response, the crowd says: "It is not our fault, we are innocent. That woman came and tempted us, with her lying tongue. To the river with her! Drown the witch" (Sartre, 1989, p. 84). This indicates that the townspeople and the priest are not vulnerable to Zeus's influence or power; rather, they behave in accordance with their habits and traditions. However, towards the end of the play, people get fully influenced by Electra's viewpoint, and the entire tradition is modified against Zeus's will. Zeus fails to manage people's beliefs and behaviors, which shows how his apparent success in stopping Electra's purposeful dance is trivial and valueless.

Another scene in which Zeus tries to prevent the conditions of Argos from being corrected is when Orestes is about to decide to take revenge from the murderers of his father and Zeus tries to stop him. Thinking of his revenge project, Orestes asks for a sign from Zeus himself. Orestes says:

O Zeus, our Lord and King of Heaven, not often have I called on you for help [...] I have always tried to act aright. But now I am weary and my mind is dark; I can no longer distinguish right from wrong. I need a guide to point my way. Tell me, Zeus, is it truly your will that a king's son, hounded from his city should meekly school himself to banishment and slink away from his ancestral home like a whipped cur? [...] And yet – and yet you have forbidden the shedding of blood [...] What have I said? Who spoke of bloodshed? [...] make plain your will by some sign; for no longer can I see my path (Sartre, 1989, p. 91).

Orestes clearly expresses his inclination to take revenge for the death of his father, but it seems that Zeus is not happy with that decision. He therefore tries to prevent Orestes from staying at Argos and fulfilling his revenge. Thus, he responds to Orestes's call for a sign by delivering the sort of magical utterance, "Abraxas, abraxsas, tsou, tsou [...]" and by making a light flash "[...] out round the stone" (Sartre, 1989, p. 92), that blocks the entrance of the cavern. Zeus is not concerned with justice or goodness at all; consequently, his involvement in life actions has no value or meaning for humans, which represents, in Sartre's terms, god's death or absence.

The role played by Zeus in such scenes is associated with the viewpoints of Nietzsche and Sartre regarding the *destructive* consequences of humans' belief in the existence of god. As aforementioned, Nietzsche (2013a) views Christianity as the religion of pity (p. 44). This implies that believing in god entails feeling pity, which causes people to not act effectively. Feeling pity holds people back and restricts their actions and decisions. This is obvious in the case of Argos where people spend their lives mourning and repenting due to a sin they have never committed. Also, it is obvious in the revenge journey of Orestes who asks Zeus for a sign to start his revenge. Orestes pities himself for having the desire to take revenge for his father's death. He says, "And yet – and yet you have forbidden the shedding of blood [...] What have I said? Who spoke of bloodshed" (Sartre, 1989, p. 91)? Due to his sense of pity, Orestes is held back from acting, he is hesitant to expressing his desire of revenge, and he is regretful for articulating that desire. Sartre views Orestes's religiosity and ephemeral belief in Zeus as a source of the man's sense of pity, which avoids him from proving his own existence and belonging to his father. In short, taking revenge is an existential need for Orestes, but his sense of pity avoids him from achieving that target. Thus, undermining the sense of pity, which stems from believing in Zeus, is introduced by Sartre as the inevitable step for Orestes to get himself defined and contextualized in Argos.

Realizing that having pity is not functional or profitable, Orestes demolishes it by challenging the will of Zeus and forsaking his belief in the role of god. Although Zeus shows him a sight of light aiming at preventing him for taking revenge, Orestes is not affected by that sign and decides that such things do not apply to him anymore and that he does not need to comply with anyone's orders. Losing faith in god, Orestes creates his own values and stops caring about what pleases or displeases Zeus; consequently, he succeeds in revenging for his father with no more hesitation or regret. Orestes's conduct here indicates the absence of god's values and roles from the scene, which makes humans rather than god as the source of order and values. In his lecture "Existentialism Is a Humanism [...]", Sartre states, "To choose between this or that is at the same time to affirm the value of that which is chosen; for we are unable ever to choose the worse. What we choose is always the better" (Sartre, 2007, p. 5). Orestes' notions of good and bad when seeking Zeus's guidance through a sign are affected by what is and is not accepted by Zeus, but when losing faith in the role of god, Orestes creates his own values and definitions of what is good or bad.

What aggrandizes the absence or death of god in *The Flies* (1989) is Sartre's persistence to deny Zeus any sort of appreciation, acknowledgment, or worship. Classic Zeus is worshipped, feared, and obeyed by the

Greeks who have shown their appreciation of that deity through statues, but Sartre's Zeus is given a status that functions as a target of mockery and irony. While "[...] the worship of Zeus formed so important a feature in the religion of the Greeks, [and] his statues were necessarily both numerous and magnificent" (Berens, 2009, p. 18), Zeus in *The Flies* (1989) is not worshipped or devoted anyone's faith or respect. Through stage directions of the first scene of the play, it is reported that "[...] [the] statue of Zeus, [the] god of flies and death [...]", has "[...] white eyes and blood-smeared cheeks" (Berens, 2009, p. 51). Whether or not this seems ugly, the statue is directly mocked and insulted by Electra, who emphasizes that Zeus is goggle-eyed and has a "[...] fat face all smeared with raspberry juice" (Berens, 2009, p. 64), which makes it look as covered with blood.

Besides, Electra emphasizes that the statue has a wooden heart, which potentially suggests Zeus' inability to conduct or maintain justice. Out of disrespect, Electra tells the statue that she is waiting for a man who

[...] will look [Zeus] up and down and chuckle, with his hands on his hips ... and his head thrown back. Then, he'll draw his sword and chop [Zeus] in two, from top to bottom [...] So the two halves of Zeus will fall apart, one to the left, one to the right, and everyone will see he's made of common wood" (Sartre, 1989, p. 64).

Electra's direct insult against Zeus is undeniable here, and the fact that wood does not have blood and therefore cannot bleed is undeniable either. Electra is saying that Zeus is dead by nature as he does not have blood and cannot bleed; consequently, she decides that her offerings to Zeus include "[...] ashes from the hearth, peelings, scraps of offal crawling with maggots, a chunk of bread too filthy even for [...] pigs" (Sartre, 1989, p. 64). She then tells the statue that she wants to spit at him since everything related to him is "[...] only a coat of paint" (Sartre, 1989, p. 64) and therefore makes people afraid. Finally, she warns the statue that the sword of that man "[...] can rip [him] limb from limb, and [he] won't even bleed" (Sartre, 1989, p. 64). This scene reflects Electra's disregard of Zeus and her belief that he has no role to play anymore in her own universe. Simultaneously, it divulges the weakness of Sartre's Zeus who fails to defend himself against people's insults or punish them for that. Electra, who is potentially representing Sartre in this regard, does not believe in Zeus or his ability to control humans anymore, which represents the death of god in Sartre's *The Flies* (1989).

Conclusion

Sartre's notion of the death of god implies the belief in the non-existence of the role of god rather than the belief in the non-existence of god, the creator. This notion, as displayed in *The Flies* (1989), suggests that humans are free and that their will and power should not be restricted by any conjectural conceptions. The death of god, for Sartre, involves the absence of god's role and value from people's life, which entails that humans are fully responsible for their decisions and deeds. Undeniably, such responsibility is tiresome as it potentially integrates feelings of hesitation, regret, and despair; yet, it is productive as it grants humans the full freedom to decide and act. Accordingly, Sartre's notion of the death of god is optimistic. It views humans as independent, fully free, and able to conduct whatever desirable for them regardless of whether gods like it.

This viewpoint disagrees with the dominant belief that Existentialism is a pessimistic approach in which the death of god entails nothingness and nihilism. Addressing Sartre's existential philosophy regarding the death of god, R. C. Sproul (2009) declares that Sartre's philosophy is pessimistic since it advocates the main source of meaninglessness among humans, which is the disbelief in god. Sproul (2009) writes,

Our concern for the moment, however, is with the pessimistic variety. Sartre does not rest with saying that man is a passion. He stresses the morbid conclusion that he is a useless passion. Here is the crux of pessimistic existentialism.

Sproul (2009) continues, "[...] useless passions are passions that are futile. They have no meaning. Sartre's grim conclusion is that all of our caring, our concerns, our deepest aspirations are empty of significance. Human life is meaningless". Regardless of why Sproul decides that Sartre's notion of the death of god is pessimistic and destructive against humans, it is hard to deny that such an evaluation does not apply to *The Flies* (1989).

In fact, Sartre's *The Flies* (1989) suggests that believing in the role or value of god may function as a source of people's misery and nothingness, thus diverging from the notions of nothingness of Hegel and

Nietzsche. While these two philosophers emphasize the despair and depression that nothingness causes to humans' life, Sartre views nothingness as a productive force of humans' life. The meaninglessness of life, for Sartre, does not mean that individuals live in despair due to the loss of values and meanings; rather, it suggests that individuals are fully free and responsible for finding and creating their own meanings and values. In *The Flies* (1989), people of Argos live in misery and suffer meaninglessness since they are controlled by the King and Queen and due to their belief in the existence of god. They worship Zeus and believe that they will get punished by that deity if they try to rebel against god's rules by living freely. On the contrary, Electra and Orestes escape that bleak atmosphere by rebelling against Zeus through denying his significance and insulting his status. In a nutshell, *The Flies* (1989) expresses Sartre's belief that nothingness and meaninglessness are the main source of people's freedom and prosperity, which proves that Sartre's belief in the death of god constitutes the backbone of his optimistic Existentialism.

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