



Existentialism: A Study Of Humanistic Approach

Akhter Hussain^{1*}, Gultaz Yesmin²

^{1*}M.A. Cotton University. Email - hussainakhter335@gmail.com

²Research Scholar, Cotton University. Email: gultazyesmin99@gmail.com

Citation: Akhter Hussain, et.al (2023), Existentialism: A Study Of Humanistic Approach, Educational Administration: Theory and Practice, 29(4), 2951-2956

Doi: 10.53555/kuey.v29i4.7648

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Existentialism, stemming from the works of philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Soren Kierkegaard, examines the individual's confrontation with the absurdity of existence, emphasizing themes of freedom, choice, and the search for meaning in an inherently meaningless universe. Existentialist methodology, particularly in therapeutic contexts, prioritizes self-awareness, personal responsibility, and the pursuit of authenticity in navigating life's existential challenges. This paper examines the existentialist methodology and the humanistic approach involved in it. Existentialism insists that philosophy should be connected with the individual's own life and experience. It should be a philosophy worth living. The existentialist philosophers concentrate mainly on inner experience of the individual. With the development of technology and industrial revolution, man has become more focused towards material achievements, using people as mere means without recognizing man as a social animal from the eye of Humanity. People in this modern era has very little time to know himself and other self, as a result trapped with issues like boredom, depression, anxiety, fear, etc. In this background, we will analyse how the philosophy of Existentialism can prove to be an important tool to solve many present issues emerged and to live a balanced life. Here we will try to understand how Existentialism can be helpful to bring a more humane concern among men so as to give relief to man from the issues emerged from the various developments in this modern world and help us to make this world a better place to live in.

Keywords: existentialism, humanity, present issues, balanced life, spirituality

INTRODUCTION

Existentialism is an attempt of man to describe his existence and his conflicts. It is a philosophy which aims to regain the lost status of man and to seek meaning which was always ignored by philosophers of ages. It has been seen in the history that philosophers have always encountered the problem of being and existence. This idea can be traced throughout the ages. The modern philosophers who associated themselves with this theme can be called existentialists. The emergence of existentialism is the outcome of the World War I primarily but after the second war it became influential. After the terrible destruction of these wars the faith of humanity was scattered and this led to a serious damage of the values. Human suffering and uncertainty about existence, anxiety, recession, depression was the outcome of these war. The Historical Background of Existentialism and the Nature of Freedom were shattered in himself or God, it gave the idea if God was or never was. This chaotic world has no longer any anchor and it is without any controlling philosophy, all existing system of thoughts are unable to help in this helpless situation. The previously achieved securities, achievements and meaningful life over the centuries became absurd. This leads man to focus the problem which has been ignored through ages that he himself is the biggest and the most mysterious problem. To solve this problem, he must develop his own sense of judgment and freedom of choice in every aspect of life. Man must rediscover meanings, values and here the work of philosophy of existentialism starts.

How Existentialism is different from other Philosophies:

What distinguishes existentialism from other movements in the intellectual history of the West is how it stretched far beyond the literary and academic worlds. Its ideas are captured in films by Ingmar Bergman, Michelangelo Antonioni. Its moods are expressed in the paintings of Edvard Munch, Marcel Duchamp, Pablo

Picasso, etc. Its emphasis on freedom and the struggle for self-creation informed the radical and emancipatory politics of Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X as well as the writings of Black intellectuals such as Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, and W.E.B. Du Bois. Its engagement with the relationship between faith and freedom and the incomprehensibility of God shaped theological debates through the lectures and writings of Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, and Martin Buber, among others. And, with its penetrating analyses of anxiety and the importance of self-realization, the movement has had a profound impact in the development of humanistic and existential approaches to psychotherapy in the work of a wide range of theorists.

SOREN KIERKEGAARD

The Problems of Boredom, Anxiety, and Despair Boredom, anxiety, and despair are the human psyche's major problems, and Kierkegaard spends most of his writing diagnosing these three ills. People are bored when they are not being stimulated, either physically or mentally. Relief from boredom can only be fleeting. Passion, a good play, Bach, or a stimulating conversation might provide momentary relief from boredom, but the relief doesn't last. Boredom is not merely a nuisance: a psychologically healthy human must find some way to avert boredom. Conflicts between one's ethical duty and one's religious duty cause anxiety. Social systems of ethics often lead one to make choices that are detrimental to one's spiritual health, and vice versa. The tension between these conflicting duties causes anxiety, and like boredom, anxiety must be escaped for a person to be happy.

Finally, despair is a result of the tension between the finite and the infinite. Humans are frightened of dying, but they are also frightened of existing forever. Kierkegaard believed that everyone would die but also that everyone had an immortal self, or soul, that would go on forever. Boredom and anxiety can be alleviated in various ways, but the only way to escape despair is to have total faith in God. Having total faith in God, however, was more than simply attending church regularly and behaving obediently. Faith required intense personal commitment and a dedication to unending self-analysis. Kierkegaard thought that, having total faith in God, and thus escaping despair, was extremely difficult as well as extremely important.

Stages on Life's Way

1. Aesthetic Stage:

The aesthetic is the realm of sensory experience and pleasures. The aesthetic life is defined by pleasures, and to live the aesthetic life to the fullest one must seek to maximize those pleasures. The aesthete is only concerned with his or her personal enjoyment, and because aesthetic pleasure is so fleeting, an aesthete has no solid framework from which to make coherent, consistent choices. Eventually the pleasures of the aesthetic wear thin, and one must begin seeking the ethical pleasures instead. The ethical life actually offers certain pleasures the aesthetic life cannot. An aesthete can never do something solely for the good of someone else, but we all know that doing things for others without personal motives can actually be incredibly enjoyable.

2. Ethical Stage :

The aesthetic life must be subordinated to the ethical life, as the ethical life is based on a consistent, coherent set of rules established for the good of society. A person can still experience pleasure while living the ethical life. The ethical life serves the purpose of allowing diverse people to coexist in harmony and causes individuals to act for the good of society. The ethical person considers the effect his or her actions will have on others and gives more weight to promoting social welfare than to achieving personal gain. The ethical life also affords pleasures that the aesthetic does not. Aesthetics steers one away from consistency, since repetition can lead to boredom. An ethical person doesn't simply enjoy things because they're novel but makes ethical choices because those choices evoke a higher set of principles.

3. Religious Stage:

In the aesthetic life, one is ruled by passion. In the ethical life, one is ruled by societal regulations. In the religious life, one is ruled by total faith in God. One can never be truly free, and this causes boredom, anxiety, and despair". True faith doesn't lead to freedom, but it relieves the psychological effects of human existence. Kierkegaard claims that the only way to make life worthwhile is to embrace faith in God, and that faith necessarily involves embracing the absurd. One has faith in God, but one cannot believe in God. We believe in things that we can prove, but we can only have faith in things that are beyond our understanding. Faith requires uncertainty, and thus we can have faith in God because God is beyond logic, beyond proof, and beyond reason. There's no rational evidence for God, but this is exactly what allows people to have faith in him.

JEAN PAUL SARTRE

1. Existence Precedes Essence:

Sartre by this statement suggests that there is no pre-given or essential nature that determines us, which means that we are always other than ourselves, that we don't fully coincide with who we are. We exist for

ourselves as self-making or self-defining beings, and we are always in the process of making or defining ourselves through the situated choices we make as our lives unfold. This is, according to Sartre, “the first principle of existentialism,” and it means, first, that man exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and, only afterwards, defines himself. Existence is fundamentally unsettled and incomplete because we are always projecting forward into possibilities, “hurling ourselves toward a future” as we imagine and re-imagine who we will be. Existence, then, is not a static thing; it is a dynamic process of self-making.

Existentialist is not denying that there are determinate aspects or “facts” about our situation that limit and constrain us. This is our givenness (or “facticity”). But what distinguishes us as humans is that we have the capacity to rise above or “transcend” these facts in the way we relate to, interpret, and make sense of them. I am not compelled by a strong desire for sex, alcohol, or cigarettes, for instance, I have the freedom to question them and give them meaning, and the meanings I attribute to them shape my choices and the direction my life will take going forward.

2. Freedom and Responsibility:

Existentialist generally affirms the view that the human being has free will, is able to make decisions, and can be held responsible for their actions. But, as we will see, this does not mean that we can do whatever we want. It means, rather, that existence is structured by our capacity to give meaning to our situation based on the actions and choices we make as our lives unfold. Insofar as we exist, we are envisioning a certain kind of life, assigning a value to our identity, and making ourselves into the kind of person we are. When we become aware of our freedom as an inescapable given of the human condition, the awareness is often accompanied by anxiety because we realize that we alone are responsible for our choices and the projects we undertake. There is no moral absolute, divine will, or natural law that can provide guidance or justify our actions. We are, in this sense, condemned to be free because “there are no excuses behind us nor justifications before us”.

Sartre was an ardent atheist and so believed that there could be no Divine Artisan in whose mind our essential properties had been conceived. Nor did he believe there to be any other external source of values: unlike for example, Aristotle, Sartre did not believe in a common human nature which could be the source of morality. Man is absolutely free i.e. ‘man is condemned to be free’ means there is no escape from freedom. Man always find himself in certain situation and in every situation there are many possibilities and he is compelled to choose one of these possibilities. If man is free, he alone is responsible for what he chooses. If man is angry, he has chosen to be angry. Earlier Sartre said even the moods and situation is chosen by man. Man is completely responsible for decision. One cannot give excuses. There is no escape route/go at for ones decision. Choice is therefore central to human existence, and it is inescapable, even the refusal to choose is a choice. With freedom comes great responsibility. This responsibility creates anguish and at times becomes unbearable. So people tries to avoid responsibility. If one avoid responsibility, it is Bad Faith according to Sartre.

3. Abandonment/Refutation of God:

For Sartre, abandonment means specifically abandonment by God. This doesn't implies that God as a metaphysical entity actually existed at some point, and went away: Sartre is echoing Nietzsche's famous pronouncement: “God is dead”. Nietzsche did not mean that God had once been alive, but rather that the belief in God was no longer a tenable position in the late nineteenth century. By using the word, ‘abandonment’ in a metaphorical way Sartre emphasizes the sense of loss caused by the realisation that there is no God to warrant our moral choices, no divinity to give us guidelines as to how to achieve salvation. The choice of word stresses the solitary position of human beings alone in the universe with no external source of objective value. The main consequence of abandonment is, as we have seen, the absence of any objective source of moral law: Sartre objected to the approach of some atheistic moralists who, recognizing that God didn't exist, simply clung to a secular version of Christian morality without its Guarantor. In order to meet the criticism that without God there can be no morality, Sartre develops his theory about the implications of freedom and the associated state of anguish.

4. Despair:

Despair, like abandonment and anguish, is an emotive term. Sartre means by it simply the existentialist's attitude to the recalcitrance or obstinacy of the aspects of the world that are beyond our control. Whatever I desire to do, other people or external events may thwart. The attitude of despair is one of stoic indifference to the way things turn out: When Descartes said, “Conquer yourself rather than the world”, what he meant was, at bottom, the same - that we should act without hope. We cannot rely on anything which is outside our control, but this does not mean we should abandon ourselves to inaction: on the contrary, Sartre argues that it should lead us to commit ourselves to a course of action since there is no reality except in action.

5. Self-Deception / Bad Faith:

Sartre thoroughly expounded his notion of the self—negation of freedom in Being and Nothingness. Since the central feature of human existence is the capacity to choose in full awareness of one's own non-being, it

follows that the basic question is always whether or not I will be true to myself. Self-deception invariably involves an attempt to evade responsibility for myself. If, for example, I attribute undesirable thoughts and actions to the influence upon me of the subconscious or unconscious, I have made part of myself into an "other" that I then supposed to control the real me. Thus, using psychological theory to distinguish between a "good I" and a "bad me" only serves to perpetuate my evasion of responsibility and its concomitants. In our relationships with other human beings, what we truly are is all that counts, yet it is precisely here that we most often betray ourselves by trying to be whatever the other person expects us to be. This is invidious, on Sartre's view, since it exhibits a total lack of faith in ourselves to the extent that I have faith in anyone else, I reveal my lack of the courage to be myself. There are, in the end, only two choices - sincerity or self-deception, to be or not to be.

6. Problem of Value:

Only man is the source of all values. Sartre accepts the view of Nietzsche. There is no God. Man is the creator of all values. He repeats the non-existence of God. Only man can create values. So there is no absolute and objective values. Had God been there, the values would have been universal and objective. Every man is free to choose to his own value. There is no value for being-in-itself. There is no ultimate explanation and justification for the world and ever for man also, so they are absurd. Man can give meaning and nature to his own life as well as other things.

Is morality not reduced to subjectivity? Sartre says the morality means commitment to values. If I am committed to my values, I am a moral being. Morality can be judged only on the basis of commitment to one's values.

MARTIN HEIDEGGER

German philosopher Martin Heidegger employed the methods of phenomenology in pursuit of more comprehensive metaphysical goals. In Heidegger's full-fledged existentialism, the primary task of philosophy is to understand Being itself, not merely our knowledge of it. Being and Time is a work of considerable length where Heidegger sets himself the task of what he calls a "destruction" of the philosophical tradition. Heidegger's "existentialist" philosophy begins with a profound anti-Cartesianism, an uncompromising holism that rejects any dualism regarding mind and body, the distinction between subject and object, and the very language of "consciousness," "experience," and "mind." Thus he begins with an analysis of *Dasein* (literally, "being-there"). But the question emerges, because we are the "ontological" (self-questioning) creatures we are, just who this *Dasein* is. Thus Heidegger's philosophy becomes a search for authenticity or "own-ness" (*Eigentlichkeit*), or personal integrity. This search for authenticity will carry us into the now familiar but ever-renewed questions about the nature of the self, and the meaning of life, as well as Heidegger's somewhat morbid central conception of "Being-unto-Death." It will also lead to Heidegger's celebration of tradition and "heritage," the importance of resolutely committing oneself to one's given culture.

1. The concept of *Dasein*:

According to Heidegger, human being should instead be conceived as *Dasein*, a common German word usually translated in English as "existence" but which also literally means "being there." By using it as a replacement for "consciousness" and "mind," Heidegger intended to suggest that a human being is in the world in the mode of "uncovering" and is thus disclosing other entities as well as itself. *Dasein* is, in other words, the "there"—or the locus—of being and thus the metaphorical place where entities "show themselves" as what they are. Instead of being sealed off within a specially designed compartment within a human being, the functions that have been misdescribed as "mental" now become the defining characteristics of human existence.

2. Being and Time:

The basic idea of Being and Time is extremely simple: being is time. That is, what it means for a human being to be is to exist temporally in the stretch between birth and death. Being is time and time is finite it comes to an end with our death. Therefore, if we want to understand what it means to be an authentic human being, then it is essential that we constantly project our lives onto the horizon of our death, what Heidegger calls "being-towards-death". The self can only become what it truly is through the confrontation with death, by making a meaning out of our finitude. If our being is finite, then what it means to be human consists in grasping this finitude, in becoming who one is. It is seen that this insight into finitude is deepened in Heidegger's concepts of conscience and what he calls "ecstatic temporality".

3. Sorge (CARE):

According to Heidegger man finds himself in a world, which is *dasein*, and which he cannot but be related to or concerned about. There may be no validity or reason of the world which surrounds him, but once there he cannot but be concerned about. In the world certain things happen over which he has no control; on the other hand, there are things which he uses as tools. He operates on the world with their help. The inner principle

which organizes his relations to the world is Care or Concern. "Care" therefore is the basis of Being-there. In his relation to the world, man experiences various moods like curiosity, anxiety, boredom, fear and angst (dread). The mood of boredom signifies that the whole world affects us and that nothing of permanent interest or value is there in the world for us.

4. ANGST (Dread):

Death is an inescapable fact of human existence; it cannot be evaded. Ordinarily, we remain oblivious of this or suppress it. But the moment it emerges in our consciousness, it produces dread, a violent fear. It pulls man out of his self forgetfulness and confronts him with the reality, his authentic existence.

In face of death man's eye shifts from the external world and concentrates on his personal being. He begins to think seriously about his past, present and future. He recognizes that future depends upon his present acts and he realizes that opportunities lost by him to lead on authentic life. This produces in him a sense of guilt. He resolves to wake up and be an authentic person who freely chooses to be.

HUMANASTIC APPROACH OF EXISTENTIALISM

Merely highlighting the existential condition of the humanity will not help people to gain a peaceful living; however, a humanistic approach to the problems of the society will assure one a happy and peaceful life. Hence it goes without saying that only a Humanistic Existentialism would help the humanity to find a way out of its problems.

As a theory of human development, it is an approach to highlight the existence of being the process of becoming. Since a person, in the becoming state, always exists in a constantly dynamic phase, "his life may be regarded as a journey on which he finds ever newer experiences and gains greater insights". Existentialism represents a protest against the rationalism of traditional philosophy, against misleading notions of the bourgeois culture, and the dehumanizing values of industrial civilization. Since alienation, loneliness and self-estrangement constitute threats to human personality in the modern world, existential thought has viewed as its cardinal concerns a quest for subjective truth, a reaction against the 'negation of Being' and a perennial search for freedom. From the ancient Greek philosopher, Socrates, to the twentieth century French philosopher, Jean Paul Sartre, and other thinkers have dealt with this tragic sense of ontological reality – the human situation within a comic context.

According to existentialism, the individuality of man is supreme and this 'individuality' is greater and more important than the existence of man, nation and the world. This philosophy recognizes the existence of individuality, opposing the notion of intelligence and nature. It is very much near to the individual life of man. Existential philosophers often focused more on what they believe is subjective, such as beliefs and religion, or human states, feelings, and emotions, such as freedom, pain, guilt, and regret, as opposed to analyzing objective knowledge, language or science. During the eighteenth century intelligence and nature got too much recognition. In opposition to this, existentialism came into being. This philosophy opposes modern industrial and technical age, science, objectivity and non-individualism. According to existentialism, man becomes a tool in the hands of industrial society, which is not good. Man should be the master of industrial society and machine should be his slave. Objectivity and materialism (science) recognize only the external nature of man and consider

him only a part of this physical process. Existentialism opposes all those one-sided movements which want to exploit man in the interest of society or group by considering his individuality secondary, no matter whether this notion pertains to Fascism or Communism or any other thought. Although existentialism realizes the need of the society, but it does not mean that society should give secondary place to the individual by exploiting him. Existentialism considers individuality as supreme, considers society as a means of its development.

CONCLUSION

The concept of Existentialism holds an important message for every human being, irrespective of their age. The philosophers have asked people to reflect that it is not God's job to align one's life with a meaningful path; it depends on individuals to decide and choose the suitable path for themselves. It suggests that when individuals feel an existential crisis, they, themselves, must assign a purpose to their lives, and nobody else can. We are our masters with the freedom to choose, and we must identify the essence of life. With this view, existentialists wish to persuade human beings to choose the right path to overcome anxiety and absurdity and lead meaningful lives. At times, existential philosophy can seem bleak or nihilistic. After all, if we are responsible for creating our own meaning in life. Existential philosophy teaches us that the search for meaning is a lifelong journey, one that is constantly evolving and changing. It is up to each of us to continue seeking out new experiences, learning from our failures, and growing as individuals.

REFERENCES

1. Adler, Martiner. J. Ed., (1923), The Great Ideas - A Syntopicon of Great Books of the Western World, Vol.2, Encyclopaedia Britannica INC.
2. Alberes, R. M., (1961), Jean Paul Sartre - Philosopher without Faith, New York, Philosophical Library.
3. Aronson, Ronald, (1980), Jean Paul Sartre- Philosophy in the World, London: Verso.
4. Bhadra, Mrinal Kanti, (1990), A Critical Survey of Phenomenology And Existentialism, Indian Council of Philosophical Research In Association With Allied Publishers, New Delhi.
5. Callan, Edward, (1955), Auden and Kierkegaard: The Artistic Framework of "For the Time Being", Vol. 48, No. 3, Penn State University Press.
6. Heidegger, Martin qtd. in "*Encyclopedia Britannica Article*".
7. Sartre, Jean-Paul, (1957), Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology, By Hazel E. Barnes. Trans, University of Colorado.
8. Sartre, Jean-Paul,(1946), "*Existentialism Is Humanism*", Les Editions Nagel, Methuen & Co.
9. Sodhganga thesis.
10. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy