

The Concept of the Philosophical Theory "Existentialism" as Being Introduced by Modern Literature and its lasting impact on Modern Society

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ABSTRACT

Like many other methodological innovations, The Concept of the Philosophical Theory "Existentialism" as Being Introduced by Modern Literature and its lasting Impact on Modern Society has been applied to indicate and examine how modern writers deal with this theory. However, this research has been done to indicate the impact of existentialist concepts on the modern society, to examine how the modern writers use this term in their genre, to give an exact definition of the term existentialism and its composers. Moreover, this research has been derived from a deep study of existentialist dramas, novels, and short stories and take help of multi-method of data collection. Furthermore, one of the major issues that has been stated in the present study by the researcher is to deal with the existentialist theory as a general and social problems which have left a crucial influence on modern humanity. This study has tried to reach some general conclusions about the benefits of using this theory in the modern literature.

المستخلص

مثل العديد من الابتكارات المنهجية الأخرى، تم تطبيق مفهوم النظرية الفلسفية "الوجودية" المقدمة في الأدب المعاصر وتأثيرها الدائم على المجتمع الحديث للإشارة إلى كيفية تعامل المؤلفين في العصر الحديث مع هذه النظرية. ومع ذلك، فقد تم إجراء هذا البحث للإشارة إلى تأثير المفاهيم الوجودية على المجتمع الحديث، ولفحص كيفية استخدام المؤلفين في العصر الحديث لهذا المصطلح في الأنواع الأدبية المختلفة، ولإعطاء تعريف دقيق لمصطلح الوجودية ومؤلفيها. وبناء على ذلك، فقد اشتمت على هذا البحث من دراسة عميقة للدراما الوجودية والروايات والقصص القصيرة كما والاستعانة بالوسائل المتعددة للحصول على جميع المعلومات والبيانات. وتم التركيز على إحدى القضايا الرئيسية وهي التعامل مع النظرية الوجودية كمشكلة عامة واجتماعية تركت تأثيراً حاسماً على المجتمع المعاصر. ولقد حاول الباحث الوصول إلى بعض الاستنتاجات العامة المهمة عند استخدام النظرية الوجودية في الأدب المعاصر.

INTRODUCTION

According to Oxford Dictionary, existentialism can be defined as a philosophical theory or approach which emphasizes the existence of the individual person as a free and responsible agent determining their own development through acts of the will. However, existentialism is a theory that is intended to explain that humans are free and responsible for their own actions in a world without meaning. Additionally, Jean Paul Sartre who is regarded as the most influential existentialist defines this theory as " is a doctrine that makes human life possible and also affirms that every true and

every action imply an environment and human subjectivity". Sartre(1945; p 18). However, the radical objective of existentialism according to Sartre's views can be stated as: it is strictly intended to indicate the connection between the absolute character of the free commitment, by which every man realizes himself in realizing a type of humanity, a commitment that is always understandable by anyone in any era and the relativity of the cultural ensemble that many result from such a choice, in fact, this concept is regarded as the fundamental aim of existentialism. Moreover, in the sense of

another existentialist Soren Kierkegaard who is considered as the father of existentialism thinks of existentialist concepts as "subjectivity is truth and truth is subjectivity" Hong Howard V. and Edna H. (1975; 253), which has to do with the way people relate themselves to truths. What he means by this is that most essentially, truth is not just a matter of discovering objective facts. While objective facts are important, there is a second and more crucial element of truth, which involves how one relates oneself to those matters of facts. Since how one acts is, from the ethical perspective, more important than any matter of fact, truth is to be found in subjectivity rather than objectivity. In Martin Heidegger's perspective, existentialism emphasizes that "the importance of authenticity in human existence, involving a truthful relationship to our thrownness into a world which we are always concerned with, and to our being – towards-death, the finitude of the time and being we are given, and the closing down of our various possibilities for being through time" John Richardson (2012; 75)." Existentialism, therefore, may be defined as the philosophical theory which holds that a further set of categories, governed by the norm of authenticity, is necessary to grasp human existence. To approach existentialism in this categorical way may seem to conceal what is often taken in to be its heart" Kaufmann (1968;12). Finally, the term existentialism encompasses all the terms which regard the nature of human situation and the philosophers who handle the issue of existentialist concepts.

1-1 Statement of the Problem

Existentialism deals with the recurring problem of finding meaning within existence. From this perspective, there are no meanings or structures that precede one's own existence. Therefore, the individual must find or create

meaning for his or her self. It is necessary and important to study in detail the idea of existentialism which exists in the absurd drama, novel, and short story of the 20th century and its impact on the modern society. In fact, one of the most famous ideas of the 20th century is lack of individuality.

1-2 Significance of the Study

The reason why this study is significant can be explained from an aspect that it will show how existentialism impact the modern society. The study is expected to contribute to the studies in the field of literature. Thus, it is hoped to be of value and interest to all those who are concerned with literary studies.

1-3 Objectives of the Study

1. To investigate modern dramas, novels, and short stories as existential critical genre.
2. To explain the impact of existentialism on modern society.

1-4 The Existentialist Concepts as Being Introduced in Literature

Existentialism is a term that can be defined as a theory which has its own crucial position in literature and philosophy. According to this theory human existence and freedom have been highlighted. This term is generally applied for philosophers, psychiatrist, thinkers, and logicians since 19th century. However, its main concern presents highly debatable ideas and thoughts which generally emphasizes on individual's freedom, situation of human existence, meaning and purpose of life, responsibilities of making decisions. The main theme of these thoughts shed light on the question of human existence, and on the idea that there is no meaning or purpose of human existence, life is meaningless. Existentialism is considered to be as a philosophical movement and is treated as traditional philosophical treatise, so that it is studied and analyzed through how individual lives his life rather than a subject or material

which can be studied from books. It is not thought that many of existentialist thoughts can be treated as main themes in literary works such as novel, drama, and short stories. However, indeed most of existentialist thoughts have been introduced and explained in literary works rather than as a philosophical issue, so that most of existentialists express and communicate their thoughts and ideas through literary works, that is the reason why most of existentialists have recourse to literature. Existentialist literature is generally a depiction of a hero of play, novel, or short story who lives in a chaotic and purposeless conditions which imply him/her to create his/her own meaning in the world. The existentialist literature reaches its peak between 1900 and 1960 by such great authors like Jean Paul Sartre, Kafka, and Albert Camus. It has been noticed that there are many of crucial examples which indicate the existential concepts through literary works, however, it can be intelligibly classifies as follows;

1-4-a Drama

Through drama works, there are many authors whose existentialist thoughts have been expressed and permeate most levels of their literary works. Jean Paul Sartre is a professional existentialist who introduces the theory and writes considerable works on it in most of his literary works such as drama, novel, and short stories. Jean Paul Sartre's plays *Dirty Hands* 1948, and *No Exist* 1944, through these two plays, he embodies and makes widely public and even fashionable his existentialist ideas. *Dirty Hand* (1948) is a political play set in the fictional country of Illyria. The play is about the assassination attempts of a leading politician. The play's story is represented in the form of a flashback with the killer intelligibly reporting how he took out his mission. The identity of the killer is settled up from the outset of the play, but

the question that arises here; whether his motivations were personal or not. However, the main theme is not who does it, but why it has been done.

No Exist (1944) is a French play, its original title named "*In Camera*" indicating a conversation behind closed doors. The story of the play starts with a valet guiding a man into a room. Finally, he gets involved with two women in that room. All these three characters are supposed to be punished, but no torturer shows up so that, they realize that they place there to torture each other. The quotation "hell is other people", indicates Sartre's concepts about the "look" and the perpetual existence, to see oneself from the sight of another consciousness.

Waiting for Godot (1953) by Samuel Beckett, where two characters Estragon and Vladimir, waiting for the appearance of a thing named "Godot", who ever appears to them. The story of the play incorporates a kind of themes such as, the meaning of one's existence, death and life, religious issues, however, such kind of themes indicates branches of the traditional claims of existentialism. So that this play is considered to be one of the crucial example of modern existentialist plays.

The Misunderstanding (1943) by Albert Camus, the play is about a person who lives overseas for many years, when he returns back he finds out his sister and mother work in a lodging house, they take in lodgers and murdering them so that he disguises identity and becomes a lodger. However, Albert Camus presents the idea that human's desire is in continuous argument with a universe that is arbitrary and unreasonable. The central theme of play depicts that life does not differentiate between the people who are in pursuit of a bad path and those in pursuit of a good path. So that, life is seen to be brutal for both the innocent and the criminal.

1-4-b Novel

Nausea (1938), is a philosophical novel by Jean Paul Sartre, the main theme of this novel is that life has no meaning unless an individual creates a personal decision that makes life meaningful. However, Sartre expresses his existential ideas as in this novel as to concern with personal identity that change over time than in essence.

Fight Club (1996) by Chuck Palaniuk, the novel's story is about an anonymous protagonist who suffers from insomnia and an uninspired job. Then, he runs into mysterious and obscure man named Tyler Durden, and they establish together an undergrad boxing matching *Fight Club*, as a typical sort of psychotherapy. In first novel for him, Chuck presents a substantial contribution of existential ideas a normative approach to criticize the society's stereotype.

The Moviegoer (1961), by Walker Percy, the novel's story is about Binx Bolling, young broker in post-war New Orleans, according to serious issues, family complications, and with previous experience, he left alone and alienated from his family. The reason why he resorts to movies and books is the way to find more meaning in his life. However, the theme of the novel is effected by existentialist ideas of authors such as; Soren Kierkegaard, in addition the audience notice that the protagonist sets out to discover the true purpose of his life.

1-4-c Short Story

The Guest (1957) is a short story by the French writer Albert Camus, the story is about two men, one of them is a policeman named Balducci, is on a horseback and the other an Arabic prisoner is on his foot, are climbing a rocky slope in Algeria. The main theme incorporates an idea of absurdity and represents as many examples of individual's possibilities (possible choice). Camus presents a great theme of choices and accountabilities.

Suddenly, a Knock on the Door (2012) by Etgar Keret, is a collection of short stories, by the stories' themes Keret espouses many of

existentialist ideas that analyze the human condition of being obliged to other human beings. He indicates the threats of everyday life that face humanity. To conclude, many existentialist deal with literary works as a depiction and an expression of their own existentialist ideas.

1-5 Existentialist Philosophers

Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1981) is a French existentialist, he is also a dramatist, novelist, philosopher, and a literary critic. He is regarded as one of the leading figures in the existentialist philosophy and phenomenology. He writes many literary works and philosophical books, *Being and Nothingness* along with his lecture *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, are considered as the most influential books and literary works, however, Sartre presents his existentialist ideas and adopts the existentialism which exposes the Fundamental relationship between human existence and the universe. He is awarded Nobel Prize for literature in 1964, but he rejected the prize, telling that "a writer should not allow himself to be turned into an institution" The Nobel Foundation (1964; 5). Jean Paul Sartre's first impression of human is that human beings are meant to be free. However, this theory is based on his belief that God or Creator is not existed, and the theory is expounded by giving a perfect example of considering a knife. In fact, he posits that if one considers a knife, one expects that the creator would have a plan for that knife; an essence. Then, Sartre points out that human being has no essence before their existence, according to his belief there is no God, therefore "existence precedes essence"(Existentialism is a Humanism). This statement is considered to be the basis for his belief that man has no ability to illustrate his own actions by mentioning any specific human nature, so that they are totally in change of their actions. They are free to take their behavior and actions, "we are left alone, without excuse"(Yoan Malinge, 2017).

Soren Aabye Kierkegaard (1813) is a Danish philosopher, religious writer, poet, and theologian in the 19th century. His philosophy has a lasting impression in the innovation of existentialist philosophy and psychology. Most of Soren's themes in his philosophy is subjectivity, and abstraction, so that he has been regarded as the father of existentialism. According to his existentialist theory, Soren presents the significance of subjectivity, which indicates how human beings are closely related to truths; subjectivity is truth and truth is subjectivity. In accord with his perspectives, Kierkegaard means that it does not matter to find out only the truth of the objects, but what it matters is how human beings are related with those objective facts. He posits that facts could be discovered in subjectivity rather than objectivity. Soren Kierkegaard in *Journals* (1835) posits that the thing is to find a truth which is true for me, to find the idea for which I can live and die. In his peerless book *Either/Or* (1943), Soren presents the concepts of aesthetic, religious, and ethical stages of existence. He states out that human beings intentionally could plan to live within either of these stages. By the aesthetic stage, he means that life can be defined as searching for pleasure, intellectual enjoyment, novelty, and sensuous desire. Then, he believes that all these trails would be meaningless and lead to such kind of frustration. The second stage of existence is the ethical, by this stage Soren means that human beings become aware and realizing of personal responsibilities for good or evil actions, and forming a commitment to oneself and other, so that each individual can take an account of his own life. The religious stage is intimately related to ethical stage, but the religious sphere encompasses the ethic. However, ethical stage incorporates a commitment to moral standards, but religious stage incorporates a commitment and relationship to the Christian God.

Martin Heidegger (1889) is a German philosopher. He is regarded as one of the influential philosopher in the twentieth century, most of his works are closely related to existentialism, and phenomenology. In *Being and Time* incomplete book by Martin Heidegger, the writer searches to examine the idea of being and posits that this has a great significance in the philosophy. Heidegger efforts to reawaken the revival of ontology through the question of "what is the meaning of being" Heidegger Martin (1962; 62). Although he does not finish the project, *Being and Time* still stands to be a remarkable philosophical work, and the most decisive impact on the 20th century, especially hermeneutics, deconstructive, and like others existentialists he delves into the purpose of authentic existence, the importance of morality, and the relation between human beings in the obscure world and existentialism.

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844-1900) is a German philosopher and one of the influential postmodernist thinkers and existentialists, additionally, to be regarded as the father of nihilism, which incorporates the idea that there is no final meaning to human existence. According to his philosophy, he deals with subject-matters such as; religion, modern culture, morality, the value of human existence, and how their lives should be explained. For Nietzsche, existence emerges as a philosophical issue in the phrase that "God is dead". Then, he insists that without God life is pointless. However, Nietzsche's existentialism espouses many themes such as; Christian virtues make people weak, so that human being have to not believe in such values or truth, personal power is essential, greatness and freedom are wanted to like life as it is, and finally facing the fact individuals only live once so that they must seize the opportunity of living the short life they hav

Simone Lucie Ernestine Marie Bertrand De Beauvoir (1908-1986) is a French feminist, writer, existentialist philosopher, and intellectual. However, she has a great influence on the theories of feminist and existentialism. De Beauvoir writes biographies, essays, novels, social issues, and specialist work on philosophy, but her treatise *The Second Sex* is regarded as the best work which makes her known as an influential feminist. Furthermore, existentialist ideals are widely incorporated by her works such as; literary outputs, theories, and at her own feminist theory. However, she agrees with her lifelong friend Jean Paul Sartre's existentialism. Additionally, De Beauvoir points out that "existentialism is a philosophy that outlines the conditions of human existence but rejects any conception of human nature; a philosophy that affirms human freedom but emphasizes that it brings with it not happy impairment but anguish and despair, a philosophy that stresses that humans have choices but expresses little optimism that we will make good use of them or even understand what it would mean to make the right choice"(Dr Anja Steinbauer 2016).

Albert Camus (1913-1960) is absurdist, existentialist (but he rejects to associate himself with the theory of existentialism) philosopher, writes an essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942). According to his essay, he highly deals with an existentialist theme such as; the meaningless of life, which are devoid of any purpose, eternal values, or influential design. However, in his essay, he makes a comparison between its protagonist (Sisyphus, a Greek character who is cursed to push a boulder up the mountain, in order to watch it go down, so that his mission is nothing), and a man from pointless world. Camus posits that "If this myth is tragic, that is because its hero is conscious. Where would his torture be, indeed, if at every step the hope of succeeding upheld? The workman of today

works everyday in his life at the same tasks, and his fate is no less absurd. But it is tragic only at the rare moments when it becomes conscious" Camus Albert(1942; 25-26).

Conclusion

The present study has reached some conclusions that existentialism is a philosophical technique for dealing with the analysis of human existence and experiences. In addition, the existentialist philosophy affirms that human being is dedicated to behave freely and responsible to his own choices and actions. However, most of the existentialist come from the continent of Europe, such as Martin Heidegger, and Karl Jaspers; from German, Gabriel Marcel and Jean Paul Sartre from French, Jose Ortega Gasset from Spain, Nicolay Berdyaev from Russia, Nicola Abbagnano from Italy, Soren Kierkegaard from Denmark, who is considered as the father of existentialism. The term existentialism is first invented by the French catholic Gabriel Marcel in 1940. Then, the term existentialism is introduced to people as well-known theory by Jean Paul Sartre who does too much to popularize the existentialist theory. In order to give a clear depiction of the existentialist thoughts, Jean Paul Sartre delivers a lecture which adopts the existentialist concepts in Paris, the lecture is entitled *Existentialist is a Humanism* in 1945. In the lecture, Jean Paul Sartre makes the concept of existentialism intelligible and defend it against its detractors. However, some existentialists consider the existentialism extends to Kierkegaard, and others extend it to Socrates and some philosophers discuss that the term existentialism should be applied to the cultural movement in Europe in 1940. Nevertheless, the term is well-introduced with existentialist ideas of Jean Paul Sartre. However, it has been noticed that most of existentialist thoughts have been introduced and explained in literary works rather than as a

philosophical issue, so that most of existentialists express and communicate their thoughts and ideas through literary works, that is the reason why most of existentialists have recourse to literature. Existentialist literature is generally a depiction of a hero of play, novel, or short story who lives in a chaotic and purposeless conditions which imply him\her to create his\her own meaning in the world. To conclude, many existentialist deal with literary works as a depiction and an expression of their own existentialist ideas.

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