

Exploring The Meaning of Existence in The Thought of Jean Paul Sartre with Abd Al-Rahman Badawi

Dewi Sofiyatul Karima

Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Corresponding E-mail: sofiyahdewialkarimah@gmail.com

Abstract

Existentialism is a philosophical doctrine that has the basis of human existence, then enters the field of literature as one of the best intellectuals and arts to reach humans. Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980) as the triumphant bearer who declared himself an atheist existentialist. The existence of man precedes his essence as man determines his own nature freely. Based on man's freedom in creating his own essence, Sartre formulated "man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself" which in existentialism itself has the concept of commitment (الإلتزام). Existentialists explain that any action done by humans is the basis of human commitment itself. The relationship between existentialism and literature is proven that some existentialist figures play a role in writing literature, even some of them understand about literature. So is the work of Abd al-Rahman Badawi as an Arab writer with existentialism.

Keywords: *Existentialism, Jean Paul Sartre, Abd al-Rahman Badawi*

Introduction

The school of existentialism is just like any other literary school. The school of existentialism (الوجودية) is a philosophical doctrine that then enters the field of literature which is one of the best intellectuals and arts to reach humans, so to understand the concept of existentialism in literature, it must return to its origins, namely the philosophy of existentialism. Etymologically, existentialism comes from the words existence and ism, which means understanding or flow. The word existence comes from the Latin *existere* which is subdivided into its English equivalents of *ex* (out) and *sistere* (stand). In terminology, this school aims to realize that individuals have an independent existence; they exist, have a reality, and evaluate their experiences. Therefore, existentialism is a school of philosophy that focuses on the understanding of humans and prioritizes existence over abstract speculation in the form of conceptual constructions (Roswantoro: 2008, 38-39). Since existentialism is based on the understanding of human existence, it does not have or pay special attention to a distinctive language style that reflects existentialism itself. Instead, it emphasizes on what the author conveys about life and human existence in his view.

The school of existentialism began to emerge in the 19th century in the form of writings at that time born from philosophers such as Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), Frydor Dostoevsky (1821-1881), and Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). It then experienced its heyday in the 20th century where among the philosophers of that century were Karl Jaspers (1883-1969) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) from Germany, Martin Buber (1878-1965) from Israel, Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973) from France who took a Christian perspective, and Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980) who declared himself an atheist existentialist. The development of existentialism is divided into two, namely Theists (believing and not rejecting God) who consider humans as a form that depends on God, and Atheists (not believing

and rejecting God) who consider humans as a form that depends on themselves. However, both agree that both theists and atheists consider that religion and philosophy are for humans themselves and the development of theories about humans.

In the previous research, it was revealed that there are three studies that have a relationship with the current research. The research is found in Puji Retno Hardiningtyas' article titled '...' which shows that Javanese human existentialism has the potential to change the mindset that opposes the oppression of natives in the Indies. The concept of Javanese human existence is realized through the awareness of individuals as creators of themselves, freedom of thought and action, the ability to choose and be responsible, and the existence of anxiety and fear. Meanwhile, rebellion is considered a form of manifestation of Javanese human thought in achieving the meaning of meaningful life, namely freeing themselves from personal colonization and Dutch colonization (Hardianingtyas: 2015).

It is also found in the writings of Heri Isnaini and Yulia Herliani who reveal the meaning of existence in the poem "Prologue" by Sapardi Djoko Damono. In his research, Heri used semiotic theory in analyzing the signifiers and signs (Isnaini: 2022). Furthermore, Ahmad Baharuddin Surya's writing discusses the subjectivity of the character 'I' which is accompanied by a conflict between subjectivities (Surya: 2016). Previous research found by researchers used Jean Paul Sartre's thoughts only. This is different from the research conducted by the current researcher, which uses the correlation of Jean Paul Sartre and Abd al-Rahman Barudi's thoughts as evidenced through the poetry of an Arab writer named Nazik.

Method

The descriptive-qualitative method is used by the researcher as a method of preparing this journal which is historical in nature by discussing the background of existence which is then practiced in classical poetry. The interpretation and explanation of each data obtained by the researcher as outlined in the discussion is a descriptive method. According to Ratna, qualitative research is research that utilizes ways of interpretation and presents them in the form of descriptions (Ratna: 2004).

Result and Discussion

The meaning of "I" in existentialism can be found in various doors, including: (melancholy) and (death). Heidegger explains that melancholy becomes a point of self-discovery of "I". However, the word "melancholy" according to existentialist figures cannot be interpreted in the same way as psychology or phenomenology, because psychologists interpret it with emotions, while phenomenologists interpret it as a human fact.

Origin of Madzhab of Existentialism

Existentialism is *a philosophy centered upon the analysis of existence and stressing the freedom, responsibility, and use the isolation of the individual* (suatu filsafat yang memusatkan kepada analisa eksistensi manusia dan menitikberatkan kebebasan, tanggung jawab, dan keterasingan individual). The emergence of this madzhab represents another aspect of the Western tragedy resulting from the Second World War that caused a deep crisis in human conscience, shaking values, minds, and morals as a result of the tyranny, murder, and displacement of hundreds of thousands of people as a result of the war (Afifi: 1992, 94). As a result of the collapse of trust in values, and increasing distrust in religion, ideals, customs, and traditions and the violation of human and individual rights that made Westerners live in a state of division, loss, confusion became suspicious of all intellectual heritage and were under the illusion that what religions, beliefs, and spiritual moral values brought were actually falsehoods and deceptions. Due to this psychologically disturbed state those who deny

the existence of God (atheists) claim that there is no reality to the existence of a Creator for lofty ideals and moral values (Qashab, 135). Even atheists will assume that God is the main obstacle to human freedom, therefore God must be eliminated or removed from human life. God for them is only a disturbance and an obstacle to the pace of thought and human freedom (Roswantoro: 2008). Such freedom in existentialism results in anxiety, abandonment, and despair. Existentialism suggests that humans do not know where they come from and do not know what they are living for (Majeed: 2011).

Existentialism's Relationship with Literature

There is a close relationship between existentialism and literature as a philosophical doctrine, and literature as an art form, because literature is the best tool that can realize human emotions. The figures of existentialism do not always discuss about philosophy, even some of them understand about literature which they then pour their thoughts in the form of stories, novels, or dramas, so that in expressing the ideas of their thoughts are not always written in a systematic or academic philosophy book (Muzairi: 2014, 27). As well as Sartre who arranged his thoughts in his work in the field of literature, one of which was entitled '*La Nausee*' (1938) which was translated by Llyoyd Alexander (1949), in the field of drama writing with the title *Les Mouches* (1943) the *Flies* which was translated by Stuart Gilbert in 1946 American edition (Muzairi: 2002, 87).

Existentialists call existentialism literature commitment literature or attitude literature that defines its position on the problems of its time completely. Existential literature does not care about form because existence itself is form, while style is a means rather than an end so there is no value in a field that does not have committed social content. Existentialism represents the wing of democratic realism in their philosophy, and they prioritize content over form and replace aesthetics in art in the second position, they adhere to social realism. The commitment demanded by existentialism is required in the application of stories and dramas, while for poetry they reduce it to a certain extent. And they believe that subjectivity can be combined with the expression of people's opinions. Sartre believed that poetry is the goal (art for art's sake) as called for by social realists (Afifi: 1992, 96-97). The function of existentialist writers is not only to create beauty, but also has social, political, and moral functions. Certain meanings resonate in existential literature among which stand out: anxiety, abandonment, despair, rebellion against the universe and God, anonymity, alienation in the homeland, boredom, fear of the mysterious unknown, and others. Existentialism, on the other hand, explains the impossibility of bringing the writer into a world that does not belong to him or her, be it the opinions or emotional feelings of the story. Sartre says that whenever prose expresses the feelings of the characters, it is made clear by the plot contained in the story, whereas poetry loses the contact that makes the words less clear because of the *athifah* contained in the poem. Therefore, the nature of poetry and prose are different (Raghib: 1983, 161-164).

Jean Paul Sartre's Thoughts

Jean Paul Sartre was a philosopher who lived at the end of the 20th century. Sartre was born in France on June 21, 1905 and died on April 5, 1980. Sartre was raised by the Protestant middle class. In college, Sartre studied philosophy especially the branch known as Phenomenology which focuses on the fact that life can be experienced but not really known. Throughout the 1930s Sartre wrote both fiction and philosophy, and in 1938 he penned the autobiographical novel *Nausea* which helped explain the position of anxious people in the modern world (Milne: 2009, 225). Sartre became very famous for the brilliance of his ideas as a very productive person in his youth whether in the fields of philosophy or literature, or psychology. As a philosopher, Sartre was quite bold and extreme in expressing the concept of human freedom. Because of his understanding of freedom, Sartre never married during his lifetime, because he thought that marriage interfered with his

freedom. However, Simone de Beauvoir was considered as his life partner without any official marriage bond (Roswanto: 2008, 19). This is an illustration of the practical application of existential principles that call for liberation from all inherited restrictions and normative values.

According to Sartre, human freedom (*pour-soi*) is its essence in revealing a way of being that allows humans to overcome situations. Sartre believes that humans have autonomous freedom that must deal with the objective reality of life, so that in the end it presents other people. Meanwhile, other people according to Sartre are objective realities that threaten other human beings (Muzairi: 2014, 59-60). Based on this freedom, humans create their own essence which is formulated "Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself", here lies the starting point of human action in an effort to give meaning to their existence (Sartre: 1948, 28). Sartre's atheistic thinking stems from Heidegger's absurdist thinking. Sartre starts his argument that human existence precedes his essence. Sartre explicitly said that humans determine their own nature freely. Despite having absolute freedom, humans will feel tormented by freedom itself, because freedom includes consciousness that is essentially present in itself. Freedom is not fully present because it is formed of nothingness and limitations, in essence freedom itself is not perfect (Dagun: 1990, 35).

Based on the close relationship between existentialism and literature, Sartre entered the field of literary writing together with his longtime companion Simone De Beauvoir. Sartre depicts with his imagination a picture of behavior that then comes the choice between doing this or not (in his imagination), because man realizes that the responsibility for his actions lies within himself. However, traditional philosophers accused him of making things up and mixing philosophy and literature (Raghib: 1983, 155). So Sartre refuted this with his argument that literature relies on symbols, similes, metaphors and imagination.

The foundation of the principle of purpose used by Sartre regarding the priority of existence is to precede essence. The concept of humans as concrete entities in reality, as expressed by Soren Kierkegaard, states that humans must be observed and experienced deeply. The deeper the appreciation of man, the more meaningful his life becomes. Existentialism rejects an objective approach in looking at humans, and emphasizes more on the subjective experience of individuals, thus rejecting forms of objectivity and impersonality in fields related to humans. Existentialism emphasizes uniqueness, the place of human existence, and the direct experience of consciousness. The ultimate goal is to "live" and be recognized as an individual. Therefore, the center of existentialism thought and its meaning lies in the existence of the individual himself. Man only comes into existence when he becomes who he wants to be, because whatever is usually regarded as a wish or desire is a conscious decision (Sartre: 2002, 45-47). Placing the entire responsibility of life entirely on the shoulders of man himself.

Philosophers of existentialism such as Jean Paul Sartre, Simone De Beauvoir, Merleau Ponty, Gabriel Marcel, Jean Val, Maurice De Jandiac, Alexandra Quiera, Nikola Berdyaev, George Gervitch, and Emanuel Levina believe that philosophy is concerned with imagination. Simone says that philosophers who go beyond the literary approach actually ignore the essence of philosophy, because they separate essence from existence and trivialize the body in favor of the soul and appearance in order to essence, whereas philosophy believes that appearance itself is essence and existence is an expression of essence. Therefore, existential philosophy does not open itself up by expressing itself through systematic study and philosophical research, but also uses novels, plays, short stories, and poetry because they are the best in realizing metaphysical existence.

Simone said in her book "Existentialism and the Wisdom of Peoples" published in Paris in 1948 that the philosophy of existentialism is related to the literary form, because the nature of its formation helps the philosopher realize the ultimate source of his existence in full and partial historical reality. In existentialist thought there is the concept of commitment (الإلتزام). Existentialists explain that any action performed by a human being is based on the human being's own

commitment. Then they call for it in literature, but their concept of commitment is radically different from the commitment advocated by the earlier social realism, which over time turned into the writer's obligation to defend certain political, social, or economic principles, because literature is nothing but direct and explicit propaganda. The existentialists' commitment, on the other hand, is based on the writer's own convictions that emanate from within him or her, provided that they are not in a position to contradict truth, goodness, and beauty.

Existentialists separate between poetry and prose not on the basis of critical criteria or precodified aesthetic values, because there are no values and gains that precede literary works. Prose is more specific and clear than poetry. The word in prose is just a means to convey meaning, but in poetry it often turns into an end in itself. Sartre says in his book 'if poetry uses words like prose, then it does not use them in the same way, or possibly not at all, because the poet does not believe in the effectiveness of speech' (Raghib: 1983, 160). But this does not mean that words lose their meaning and connotations, as meaning is the only tool that can connect words into meaningful units.

Words reflect meaning but do not express it. The poet views the word as a mirror. Whereas prose according to Sartre is more capable of commitment because it extracts the writer from the confines of his narrow self and connects him to the outside world, poetry is committed to reflecting the poet's self-image, making it difficult for the poet to commit.

Existentialism View

Among the most prominent philosophical and intellectual opinions in this regard are:

- Existence precedes Essence: Sartre says that man exists first and then directs his essence, because in reality man's existence is his choice of what he himself wants.
- Limiting the existence of the individual to his or her thoughts and denying the existence of a prior essence. Man acts freely in the universe without regard to religion, customs and norms. Man is only subject to his own reason. Existentialism exaggerates his subjectivity and makes him the master of the universe because man is the owner of free thought that does not need a creator.

This concept of freedom does not aim to destroy society but rather aims to destroy what is inherited and replace it with new values created by humans themselves. Sartre's freedom does not mean destruction or chaos. The basic problem for existentialism is the individual's relationship with other intermediaries. This encounter with others raises the anxiety that others will limit and threaten personal freedom by using people as officers to achieve their own goals (Roswanto: 2008, 71). This personalized tendency stems from the understanding that encounters with others will lead to self-objectivity.

Existentialism's Literary View

In the book "Overview of Literary Criticism", Liaw Yock Fang explains that existentialism is a school of philosophy that later became the basis for a literary school. Its main teaching is that man is his own creator. Man is not destined or created by God. If a human willfully allows himself to be influenced by external forces, it is his own fault. Therefore, literary works of existentialism strongly emphasize action, whether it is an action done with consciousness or without consciousness. Existentialism is predominantly philosophical in character and has little to say in literature:

- Sartre said "there is no doubt that literature is a social reality and the writer, even before taking up the pen must be convinced of that. And his responsibility must permeate all aspects of himself, for he is responsible for everything."
- Existentialism prioritizes content over form in literary works. The function of the writer is not only to create beauty, but also has a desirable social, political, and moral function.

- Those particular meanings resonate in existential literature that comes from philosophies about God and the universe. These are natural meanings that must be generated by someone who has no faith in anything, does not know the purpose of life, and sees existence as futile.
- Existentialists are particularly interested in the arts of novels and theater, as they are better able to highlight their ideas and express literary commitment.

Existentialist literature has a view primarily on the view of commitment. Commitment stems from the responsibility spoken of. Being responsible for the choices made by a writer. The writer must have a concept of commitment from the beginning, by devoting his literature to the problems of society, and defending human freedom. In addition, the writer must also take a political stance with what is happening in the world and it is not allowed for him to just watch what is happening, even indifferent (Qashab, 138). Sartre defines a very broad line of commitment in literature. Literary works are both social reality and the author. Whatever the author will write, be it the storyline or even the tragedy that will be seen in the story is the author's responsibility that must be decided as a form of commitment from the beginning. As with Sartre's literary writing entitled "ما الأدب" there are three frameworks of problems that are questioned, namely what is writing about, why is it written, and for whom do we write, because the function of the writer is for others, not just for himself.

The Development of Literary Existentialism in Arabia

The development of existentialism in the Arab world is still considered a little discussion, although its development was followed by Arab writers in the modern era. The leading figure and historian in Arabia is Abd al-Rahman Badawi. Badawi explored existentialism before Sartre rose to prominence. Badawi's discernment was born after the end of British control and World War II. In Badawi's work, which he wrote in his fictional work Humum al-Shabab, there are various meanings that enlarge the potential of the self: individualism, authenticity, fear, responsibility, and freedom.

The Madzhab of Existentialism in Arabic Literature

The poem "*Anaa*" by Nazik al-Malaikah is a philosophical search for human nature. This poem illustrates the idea of human existence that is able to express its own existence and realize its existence in the world according to its wishes. The concept of existentialism in this poem can be easily understood, as Sartre's view of human nature is that humans are in the darkness of shadows. In addition, the poem defines his existence and radiates his existence as a form.

أنا
 الليل يسأل من أنا
 أنا سره القلق العميق الأسود
 صمته المتمرّد أنا
 قنعت كنهى بالسكون
 ولففت قلبي بالظنون
 وبقيت ساهمة هنا
 أرنووتسألني القرون
 أنا من أكون؟
 والريح تسأل من أنا

أنا روحها الحيران أنكرني الزمان
أنا مثلها في لا مكان

I

*The night asks who I am
I'm the secret of the deep, black turmoi
I am his proud silence
I cover my essence with silence
I folded my heart with conjectures/thoughts
And I'm still a contributor here
I stare at the centuries asking me
Who am I?
The wind asks who I am
I am the confused soul of an age that denies me
I am like the wind that has no place*

In the second stanza, he describes himself as a dark and frightening night with no lights around him, but he emphasizes his position as a contributor. The third stanza describes like the wind that moves according to the direction of the gusts, attractive but still punctuated by feelings of confusion. The fourth stanza mentions the character as 'I' like time or period which contains a definite meaning which means existing, present, and concrete. Explaining that 'I' have the power to roll back history and resurrect history, even carve the history of the future. This completes the dialog of 'I' in the poem above.

Conclusion

In general, existentialism is a school of philosophy that was born due to the dissatisfaction of some philosophers with traditional philosophy and then entered the field of literature, which is one of the best intellectuals and arts to reach and realize emotions in humans. The close relationship between existentialism and literature is as a philosophical doctrine and literature as its art form. Sartre, who is a famous figure of existentialism, does not believe in the existence of God. Sartre's thinking is very free which explains that humans create themselves. Sartre formed the human nature itself so that it exists. A prominent Arab figure who collaborated his thoughts with Sartre's was Badawi. Nazik's poem tries to explain the existence of the character 'I'.

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