



ATTITUDE OF EXISTENTIALISM ABOUT "EXISTENTIAL DYING" AND ITS HUMANISTIC MEANING

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Abstract. Existentialism is the philosophy of attitudes, a step away from traditional philosophy. The stance of existentialism of "dying" is one of those attitudes. Dying is a process by which the subject loses subjectivity, leading to a loss of personality due to the disparity between material life and spiritual life that people do not recognize. The standpoint of existentialism on dying, besides unconvincing arguments, still exudes humanistic thoughts about humans. That meaning does not disappear when people face the industrial revolution 4.0.

Keywords: dying, humanistic meaning, attitude

1. Introduction

Existentialism is a step away from traditional philosophy. Therefore, existentialism does not give priority to the perception of the world as the founders of philosophical thought, but what existentialism primarily concerns is how to preserve the human personality in modern society when machines take the throne, "leading to the fact that physical forces begin to have intellectual life, and human life and other things are lowered into a merely physical force." [1]

In the history of philosophy until the twentieth century, there has not yet been a philosopher or a philosophical system to heighten the subjective role or the human subjectivity like existentialism. It is possible to name George Berkeley (1685-1753), an English philosopher who is considered a celebrity of subjective idealism. He viewed existentialism from the same system of reference but at different levels. Because Berkeley only studied *non-materialism*, not touching the concept of existentialism that claims that *this world is nothing without human beings*. With the absolutization of the role of the subject, existentialism sees philosophy only as the views, the attitude of the philosopher of the world and the humans. This is the principle of existentialism. Studying existentialism, one should follow this principle if he wants to understand the existential theory properly, ensuring the scientific nature when approaching existentialism and avoiding the understanding of existentialism from the interpretation of other philosophical systems.

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The existentialist attitude of dying and its current meaning is considered according to that principle [2].

2. Content

The attitude of existentialism to human beings will determine the attitude of existentialism to *dying*. Existentialism is divided into two branches: theistic existentialism and atheistic existentialism, but they are developed on the following grounds: a human himself creates his own history (or human himself creates his own identity) and a human is a personality. Unlike rational philosophy about how it sees the relationship between nature and phenomena, existentialism affirms "*Existence precedes essence*". According to the existential conception, humans create their own identity, but the identity is not what already exists so that the human life is merely the reflection of that identity like the world of objects without subjectivity. In *Existentialism is a humanism*, J-P. Sartre elaborated: What does "*Existence precedes essence mean?*" This sentence means that a human must first exist, encounters each other, and appears in the world, and then he defines himself. If it is impossible to define a person on the basis of the conception of the existentialist, it is because he is first and foremost nihilistic. A human only exists after he appears and will exist like what he creates. Thus, there is no human nature because there is no God to create that nature. A human not only exists as he is conceived, but he exists as what he wants to be; and because he is conceived after he exists, and because he wants to show up after that momentum towards existence, and therefore, a human is nothing but what he creates himself. That is the first principle of existentialism." We want to say that a human must first exist, that is, he must throw himself into the future and be a self-conscious man of the future. But if it is true that *existence precedes essence*, the human is responsible for his being. Thus, the first step of existentialism is to put every human being into grasping his existence and being fully responsible for his very existence." [3]

Many scientists believe that "*Existence precedes essence*" has something similar to the concept of Self-made man of American pragmatism [4]. Actually, the similarities are a few, but the discrepancies are numerous. The similarity is that the two concepts affirm that a person determines his fate. The discrepancy is that America's Self-made man is the man of action, the man of effectiveness, and that effectiveness can be perceived in terms of quantity and what we see via experience. As for "*Existence precedes essence*", firstly, it is a philosophical attitude opposite to the reference system of traditional philosophy that sees humans as *objects* in the world. Secondly, a human creates himself not in terms of material values but in the attitude of life, in which there are relationships with his own existence and with others, but he remains himself in a society full of unreasonable relationships that human intellect does not recognize. (Not what Buddhism considers as a result of ignorance and ambition). "*Existence precedes essence*" is also the process of

purifying and eliminating the relationships of being. Therefore, "*Existence precedes essence*" is the capacity that only a human as a personality possesses. "A human is a personality" means that a human does not merge what is his own into what is common. In other words, he must remain himself as a whole, not turns into another person. Therefore, personality is understood as a being with its own characteristics to form the subjectivity of that being that does not exist in anyone else [5]. The loss of personality is the loss of being, the loss of the subject, the degradation, the loss of the self although one remains biologically the same as before. In other words, one loses the personality when one is not himself but another person.

This is the dying of personality. In that sense, dying is the existential attitude (why one comes to that situation) of those who have died (often unaware of their dying), of those who are about to die (there have been deviations from personality), and of those who are alive (personality). Therefore, the categories of existentialism are not devices of perception to change the reality as of traditional philosophy but just the attitude of the existentialist about the existential situations of being. They are the windows through which a human being looks outside, keeping the security of the subjectivity of its own. Talking about the death of personality, the great founders of existentialism like J-P. Sartre (1905–1980) and M. Heidegger (1889–1876) used special ways of expression that *one cannot understand objects as they are* if he does not understand existentialism.

In order to understand the attitude of existential philosophy about dying as the name of it, we cannot avoid looking at the reason for the birth of existentialism. The birth of existentialism was the reaction of Western intellectuals to the expansion of economy and technology in society, which leads to the fact that the relations between individuals and society have conflicts in terms of the uniqueness of individuals (personality) and pre-programmed *digital* relationship as we see it today (it was prerequisite only).

In terms of understanding the concept "*individual*", Western philosophers, especially those inclined to anthropological philosophy, pay little attention to the social aspect of this concept. Therefore, economic dominance and the rise of technology have led to a way of understanding that individuals are "put in the same basket". The lasting concept of individuals as the oases has been threatened. In addition, the development of science and technology has caused personal insecurity because the measures to control society and individuals are becoming state-of-the-art [6]. *Every coin has two sides*. Therefore, the main point here is the perspective and the way of approach. Previously, Soviet scholars claimed that the emergence of existentialism was due to war and the philosophy of the tragic fate of people in capitalist society. That is the way to look at the opposite ideology. Therefore, this point of view can cause a loss of a certain amount of scientific objectivity. After 1945, when existentialism became a cultural and lifestyle vortex, it is impossible to say that existentialism is the tragic result of wars, and it is impossible to require

people to fight to overthrow a regime. Looking at the *history* of J-P. Sartre, we can find vivid examples of this comment. Existentialism is merely a reflection of the intellectual cult. All categories of existentialism have shown this fact. This is why the existential philosophy becomes the philosophy of attitudes and foremost the attitudes towards the human himself. Society is the whole of beings for which each being is unique. Only in this circumstance, one comes to understand dying – the dying of a being is a process rather than a sudden biological death. Therefore, every death is unique. This leads to the fact that every death is different. Until death, human beings are still unique.

Death is the end of the transformation. Dying begins when one does not realize the true value of life. There is something like one getting entangled with ignorance and falling into the craving in Buddhist philosophy. If Buddhism says that greed, anger and delusion, and ignorance and craving are the vicious circles of a maze that makes people not to distinguish the truth from fake. They then choose the fake instead of the truth. Existentialism claims that when people are satisfied with what they have – with the material value – they start dying. The call of the mind is gradually erasing the sacredness of the heart and the dynamism of instinct, and the human being is becoming like other ordinary objects in the universe. This is the first step that takes away personal subjectivity.

With existentialism, preserving subjectivity is to preserve the highest value of humans. Thanks to subjectivity, the human can establish personal value and is a personality. Thanks to subjectivity, the human has the right to declare the meaning to objects. In other words, because of subjectivity, the human has the same power as God. J-P. Sartre argues that with such a concept of human subjectivity, *existentialism is a humanism* [3].

Therefore, dying – the dying in light of the existentialism theory – begins with the gradual paralysis of subjectivity. That is the process of permanent resurrection in what we are. Essentially, the cause of dying – the dying of being – lies in perception. Therefore, the existentialists call their theory the philosophy of awakening. It is also an excuse for existentialism to condemn traditional philosophy that attaches great importance to understanding the world rather than finding ways to understand the very human beings.

Hegel (1770–1831), the great German philosopher, said: “What makes sense exists, what exists makes sense.” So, where is the sense of existentialism? Where is the sense of existentialism about dying? In fact, the reason for both can be found in the same root, i.e., the development of society, in which there is no balance between the material life and the spiritual life, between the rational and the irrational, and conflicts arise. Humans cannot sacrifice spiritual values in exchange for pure material values. Marxist philosophy has shown that material only plays a decisive role in epistemology. It is the roots to explain the power of spiritual meanings. In this regard, from ancient times, the philosopher Epicure (341–270 BC) had trials and proofs

when discussing human pain and drawbacks [7]. The fact that the attitude of existentialism about dying has the humanistic value also comes from this reality.

As a major philosophical movement of the twentieth century, existentialism has warned of the decline in spiritual values in the modern West via the attitudes about dying and pointed out the interaction between the material life and the spiritual life of human beings. That interaction does not remain at mechanical relations because a human is a unique entity. The inner world and the spiritual and emotional life of a person are still full of mysteries that the scientists and the latest scientific achievements have not yet fully understood. This reveals that the progress of society cannot be judged according to material indicators. There must be a harmony between material and spiritual values so that the Truth, the Good, and the Beauty are present at the highest level of eternal humanistic values.

Today, humanity has wide-spread opportunities to achieve the eternal humanistic values in the 4.0 industrial revolution. It is necessary to consider that the existentialist attitude of dying in modern society is a scientific suggestion for the use of the scientific achievements that this revolution creates new human values, while previous production systems had no chance to create. To do that, we have to prevent scientific and technical achievements from becoming tools for human enslavement and crushing the human spiritual life. All achievements, no matter how big, are created by humans. Those achievements cannot determine human destiny. Instead, how to view and use those achievements so that human beings do not die the way existentialism warns of is the goal of this revolution.

3. Conclusion

The attitude of existentialism to dying is only a view of philosophy in many ways of looking at dying in the history of philosophy. Overall, the existentialist attitude of dying is humanistic. People want to have a spiritual life not too imbalanced with social relations and with economic relations leading to adversity between the spiritual life – the inner world – and the reality of human survival, pushing people to degradation and loss of their own. Existentialism calls that reality ‘dying’. Scientifically, it might be necessary to further study the existentialist attitude to dying to come to a credible scientific conclusion. Even if refracted by the view of the existential philosophers, the existentialist attitude of dying is still a view for humanity and the development of mankind. It is also the bridging significance when we are facing the 4.0 industrial revolution.

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