
BEING AUTHENTIC: A STUDY OF EXISTENTIAL CHOICE

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Abstract: Gone are the days where the human beings lived in a harmonious innocence. Hot world of today needs everything hot; even human relationships are expected hot. Hasty relationships end up with cold feelings. Attempting a study to find out solution for an individuals' peace, this paper focuses on existentialism, a philosophy that speaks for an individual's authentic living, which calls for getting rid of all disguises that one used to wear to live in this world. Disguises like religion, moral etc restraint an individual's freedom, say existentialists. Existentialism analyses the ways for human beings absolute freedom on the basis of the choices they make in their life. This paper analyses the significance of the existential notion called 'choice' which forms the crux of being an authentic individual.

Keywords: Authentic, Choice, existentialism

Introduction: Existentialism is a philosophy which attempts to find out solutions for the individual's meaningful existence. As a human centered philosophy, its significant notions comprises of the basic elements of an individual's living. Notions like dread one faces, freedom of the individual, choices which he or she makes, a call for authenticity and death are widely discussed by existentialists. The important existentialists are Kieekegaard, Nietszhe, Sartre, Marcel, Buber, Heidegger and Simon De Beauvoir. The common notions among these are freedom, choice and authenticity. Authenticity speaks of the individual's subjective choices which are made by the individual that is absolutely free from social or religious influences. This paper tries to attempt to study one important notion called 'choice' which lays the foundation for the individual's authentic living.

It is not a current burning issue but even from the early ages human beings struggle for freedom which should be solely subjective that will ultimately brings fulfillment in one's own life, on the contrary in everyday living, an individual face many complexities which every one of us longs to be unheard of. To some point or to a greater extent it might be accepted that individuals suffer much because of the compromises they make, sometimes consciously or most of the time unconsciously with the people around them. Being a social responsible person an individual always need to comprise even their basic positive joyful moments. For instance, a man who is at his 40s wishes to shower himself in rain but he controls his desire to do so due to the society's pointing finger or fault finding eye or becoming a laughing stalk in front of them. Hence it is the so called living standard that is set by the various factors like society, religion and ethical values unconsciously control the being called the 'individual'. Throughout the ages, philosophy keeps on trying to find solution for this 'being' called 'individual's authentic living.

The urge for individual freedom is felt even in the early ages with Socrates basic question for how to be a complete individual. Rene Descartes jumps into a conclusion that "I think therefore I am (Lemay 16)". The insistence of 'self' thus becomes an inevitable question to the philosophers of all centuries. Greek and Roman philosophies like Stoicism and Epicureanism have to some extent found way for an individual's meaningful existence.

Thomas Flynn says: "This concept of philosophy flourished among the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers of the Hellenistic period. Their attention was focused primarily on ethical questions and discerning the proper way to live one's life. As one Classical scholar put it, 'philosophy among Greeks was more formative than informative in nature. The philosopher was a kind of doctor of the soul, prescribing the proper attitudes and practices to foster health and happiness'(Flynn 1). Aristotle's perceptive of concrete living cannot be excluded in the significance of the study of 'being'. Some of the early philosophies have provided only abstract solutions to the 'being's' freedom in the given lived time. This way of abstract notions towards a 'being's' life is opposed by a particular group of philosophers whom are very much concerned with concrete notions that should be found out for the freedom of the 'being'. The main focus of this paper is to study a particular group of philosophers whose main aim is to find out solutions to the concrete life of an individual in an authentic way. They call themselves Existentialists, where even the name of this philosophy denotes the significance of a 'being's' existence in the given life time. Even today, it is appropriate to make a keen study in Existentialism in spite of its brand of 19th century philosophy; because of its basic study on human beings. As a human centered philosophy Existentialism always relates itself with any century indeed with the 21st century. Existentialism is a 19th century philosophy and the

two profounder of this philosophy are Soren Kierkegaard(1813-55) and Friedrich Nietzsche(1844-1900).The two philosophers insist the notion called 'truth' of the 'being'. Socrates has risked his life for this 'truth', these two philosophers common perspective is that there should be a truth for which an individual must be ready to die like Socrates. This calls for authentic living mingled with choice, freedom and responsibility and these notions form the crux of Existentialism. Every individual make choice consciously; sometimes unconsciously in their life. This paper wants to share some of the ideas of one particular notion called 'choice'. In *Historical Dictionary of Existentialism* the term 'Choice' is defined like this: "The existentialist of choice sometimes been misconstrued as "being able to choose whatever one wants", which has led some to mistake existentialism for a philosophy of irrationalism and personal whim. The existentialist notion of choice rests, rather on the connection between choice and personal freedom" (Michelman 91). Choice as stated in the above two works is defined not in the terms of personal absolute freedom but in the terms of freedom mingled with the responsibility.

Existentialists say that the choice the individual makes is actually a call for the readiness to accept the responsibilities for our choices. Choice signifies the individual's status of 'to be or not to be', a stage where the individual willingly or out of compulsion makes a choice in order to move, a move that 'must' be made, towards the next stage of life.

Making a choice forms the existence of the individual, an existence that could be looked at two perspectives; one authentic living and the other unauthentic living. Indeed this notion 'choice' is the basic element that an existentialist speaks of. Choice is the foundation which determines the other important concepts in existentialism like anxiety, freedom and authenticity. An individual's choice leads to two results: one that will bring anxiety if the individual feels that it's a wrong choice in spite of its authenticity and the other that creates a comfort zone which naturally emerges out of individual's freedom to choose. An individual should rely upon his or her own choices in the 'lived time'. Choices based on the freedom of the individual thus expresses that there is no eternal force compelling him or her to make that choice. Existentialist talks not only of liberal choices but also of the aftermath that is going to bring in one's life. Existentialist say that the freedom which allows the individual to make a choice

also leaves a shadow of one's responsibility there. Kierkegaard, the father of Existentialism, discusses three kind of choices in his book *Either / Or* on the basis of stages of life. Upon Kierkegaard's views on choices in *Either/Or*, *Historical Dictionary of Existentialism* says as follows:

For Kierkegaard choice is essentially ethical choice, a personal decision that, because it is made with the "the whole inwardness of the personality" that draws the individual out of waywardness of aesthetic existence into awareness of freedom and responsibility that constitutes the ethical. The crucial element is not correctness, but commitment... Because human beings are essentially free, they are in one sense free to choose to do wrong, for example, to live selfishly in pursuit of pleasure; but if such a life-choice is to be genuine, then commitment to it must be made explicit-it must be recognized as consciously chosen rather than externally compelled- and once this occurs, the choice of wrongdoing leads inevitably to guilt and ultimately for Kierkegaard to repentance. (Michelman 91-92)

Sartre is the significant existentialist of the 20th century whose *Being and Nothingness* is considered as the seminal work in Existentialist philosophy. For Sartre, the notion choice is "you are free, therefore choose-that is to say, invent, No rule of general morality can show you what you ought to do: no signs are vouch- safed in this world (EH 38)". But this freedom does not escape the individual from the consequences of what he has done. Sartre says "What is the very heart and centre of existentialism, is the absolute character of the free commitment, by which man realizes himself in realizing a type of humanity-a commitment always understandable, to no matter what epoch- and its bearing upon the relativity of the cultural pattern which may result from absolute commitment (EH 47)". Sartre here brings out the crux of the decision making of the individual that again insisting the unavoidable commitment and also a call for the individual to be free to choose.

Conclusion: To have a bird's eye view one may understand the notion choice in existentialism as a position of an individual according to Sartre, who is "condemned to be free" (*Being and Nothingness 439*)" and make his or her own choice. Existentialists accept that this free choice of the individual invites for commitment and responsibility. Here the individual is given the absolute power or freedom to make a subjective choice under the guise of aftermath impact factor. To conclude, existentialism philosophy cries for an authentic living of an individual positively.

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