

Authenticity and Inauthenticity in relation with Existentialism

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Abstract

This paper explains authenticity and inauthenticity as characteristic features of existentialism. Existential philosophers have discussed life from different angles. Existentialism is actually not only a philosophy but is ways of life. Authentic existence and inauthentic existence are distinctions discussed by various existential philosophers.

Introduction

Existentialism explains life through philosophy and literature. It has rejected many traditional values and put forth several new principles. 'Existence precedes essence' is considered as the central code of existential thinking. This has discarded the conventional sacred theoretical conviction that every existence has predefined meaning given by its architect. Existentialism has at the very first time explained the absurdity of human existence in the grimy world. Life is meaningless and disorganized. Meaningful existence is possible only through individual choice, freedom, responsibility and subjective reality. Existentialism is a very vast concept and it covers all aspects of life. Believer as well non believer existentialists are found. All literary writers are also divided in several groups. Understanding existentialism fully is almost impossible task. Only reality is that all these intellectuals are busy defining human existence. From there valuable writings we cannot define existentialism but we can certainly find out characteristics of existentialism. This article is an attempt to discuss authenticity and Inauthenticity as characteristic feature of existentialism.

Authenticity:

Authenticity is one more thematic aspect of existentialism. Authenticity is associated with existence. Existence should be authentic. Linsenbard is a scholar studying Sartre. According to her, Sartre distinguished being, as 'being-in-itself' and 'being-for-itself'. Being in itself is a material object and being for itself is free subjective entity. By distinguishing being as being for itself Sartre frees individuals to develop their own existence. In An Investigation of Jean- Paul Sartre's Posthumously published Notebooks for an Ethics Linsenbard asserts that-

“the human beings are free projects 'in-the-making' and they all are “aiming toward a certain kind of future. But this 'freedom of choice' is not acknowledged by every human being and

therefore, again two categories are emerged out of it which are defined as ‘bad faith’ and ‘good faith’”. (Linsenbard 107)

The terms ‘good faith’ and ‘bad faith’ are illustrated by Sartre in his famous treatise Being and Nothingness. According to Sartre ‘Good Faith’ is authentic category. Individual with good faith admits himself responsible for his own way of life. He consciously makes his choices. They don’t succumb to play a socially assigned role. They are their own creator. Conscious choices made by them inspire them for freedom. Actually sense of freedom is given by birth to every individual. But it is to be acquired by rejecting traditional notions of happiness or alternative ways of satisfaction. This practice of getting free is ‘good faith’ for existential thinkers. One should live with ones freedom and responsibility. This acceptance is authenticity.

We are our creator and not anyone else is responsible for our life is to be understood. When we confirm this notion in life it is authentic life. Martin Heidegger is the first philosopher who introduced the concept of ‘authenticity’ in philosophy in Being and Time. In fact, the term originates from Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard uses authenticity for selfhood which is free from social obligation and aesthetic standards. Like Sartre Kierkegaard does divide being into two categories- ‘Becoming a Self’ and ‘being a self’. His becoming a self is a plea for considering an individual as singular and particular rather than general and universal. He expects that we should choose our own way and adhere it. Commitment is necessary and personal commitment grows into authenticity. As the commitment is more the authenticity is powerful. To increase authenticity commitment should be intensified. High level commitment is generally found in religious faith and that is why, in the world religion is more ‘authentic’. But the objectivity in religious faith is hazardous. Religious commitments are subjective but objectively uncertain. Authenticity demands freedom and responsibility of a subjective individual.

Taylor explains authenticity in his The Ethics of Authenticity-

“Being true to myself means being true to my own originality, and that is something only I can articulate and discover. In articulating it, I am also defining myself. I am realizing a potentiality that is properly my own. This is the background understanding to the modern ideal of authenticity, and to the goals of self-fulfillment or selfrealization in which it is usually couched. This is the background that 97 gives moral force to the culture of authenticity, including its most degraded, absurd, or trivialized forms. It is what gives sense to the idea of “doing your own thing” or “finding your own fulfillment.” (Taylor 29)

All this discussion wants a kind of doing and fulfillment from an individual. It is a challenge for an individual to generate meaning of the life and make it authentic. In short, meaningful life is authentic and to make life meaningful by doing actions and with commitment is essential. According to Sartre also, “authenticity is creation of meaning.” (Breisach 197) Giving meaning to life is unique task for every individual. “Meaning in life is obtained through an authentic existence. The conditions for achieving this kind of existence are commitment to actualize one’s possibilities to choose and decide about the possibilities

and to act on them”. (Orbach 284) Authentic action begins with the realisation of meaning by the individual self. Realisation of meaning, action and responsibility of action done are the three parts of authentic existence. Every individual is bound to admit the responsibility of his actions performed in the life. This builds up authentic existence.

Bhagwad Gita says ‘TANSTHITIKSHASV BHARATA’ you are responsible for your actions. You should bear the responsibility of the consequences arising from your actions. It is the universal truth that “Man moves physically, morally, and intellectually in view of an end, in order to attain a greater richness of his own being and existence as well as in order to enrich and enhance the being he finds in the surrounding world.” (Reinhardt 198) Individual is free and wants to improve his self hence authenticity becomes subjective. Everybody’s authenticity lies with himself. It has no relation with others. I am authentic in my life. I become authentic along with my choice and freedom. In this context Golomb says, “authenticity is indeed derived from auctoritas, the authority in question is self-directed – it is the mastery of one who freely creates the pathos of authenticity and strives to express and live it in the everyday.” (Golomb 10)

This authentic life is equal to the expression of Bhagwat Gita. Gita in its 16th chapter discusses two different alternatives available in human life Daiv (Divine) and Asur (Devil). To choose the correct alternative for life and to stick up to that and to act accordingly and finally to tolerate the results of actions makes life authentic. Maslow has also discussed the concept of “selfactualization” which is akin to the concept of authenticity. Existentialism is a way of life and authenticity is a tool for living life. There is no final authenticity like element. Maslow calls Divine and devil as Progression choice and regression choice. He thinks self actualization brings authenticity. He explains self- actualization as “There may be a movement toward defense, toward safety, toward being afraid; but on the other side, there is the growth choice. To make the growth choice instead of the fear choice a dozen times a day is to move a dozen times toward self-actualization. Self-actualization is an on-going process; it means making each of the many single choices about whether to lie or to be honest, whether to steal or not to steal at a particular point and it means to make each of these choices as a growth choice.” (Maslow 45)

Authenticity of life depends on the individual. How an individual perceives the world? What are his beliefs? What is the meaning for him? These are the determinant questions of authenticity. Each authenticity is different. I have no right to judge my friend or partner from my views. His authenticity may be inauthentic for me. My authenticity may be wrong for his choices and responsibility. Authenticity is subjective and everyone should make his own judgment. In this regards Breisach states, “authenticity is a term used to characterize a way of being in the world in which one’s being is in harmony with the being of the world itself...we are inauthentic to the extent that we are in conflict with the givenness of being.” The Authentic person recognizes that human existence is a mystery, and he or she ventures forward creating meaning as he or she journeys through life,” (Breisach 126) By “choosing one’s self” Kierkegaard means “to affirm one’s responsibility for one’s self and one’s existence.”

Existence is an alive phenomenon. It is always living in the universe at a particular place. It also accepts responsibility of existence. Man has 'will to live' says Nietzsche. This 'will to live' is acceptance of choice, action and responsibility. This type of authenticity in life is almost impossible for individuals. Our life choices and actions are continuously molded by the society in which we live and by the situations in the world around us. Individuals are alienated and isolated in the world. Many individuals only follow the paths accepted by others. They are mere followers. We cannot take account of them for authenticity. Those who make choice under the shadow of alienation have feeling of anxiety and dread which make it difficult to live the authentic or meaningful life. "What is demanded of man is not, as some existential philosophers teach, to endure the meaninglessness of life, but rather to bear his incapacity to grasp its unconditional meaninglessness in rational terms" (Frankl 141).

It is true that life is meaningless and individual should try to give meaning to life are two paradoxical points combined by existentialism. We may think from Camus angle that life is a meaningless game but at the same time we cannot forget that people live their life happily. Death or suicide may be the logical option from existential meaningless angle but no one wants to die is a fact. This riddle is solved by the existential element authenticity. "In limitedness of our autonomy, as in our limitedness of awareness and action, resides the existential anxiety that is part of the human experience. We know our limitedness and seek for some surety, some sign "out there" and finding none, are confronted by a sense of the emptiness of the "out there" and the threat of ultimate meaninglessness." (Bugental 38)

Sartre believes that "Man is no other than a series of undertakings, that he is the sum, the organization, the set of relations that constitute these undertakings." Man is a totality of his activities done in life. He made many choices throughout the life. Every choice has resulted positively and negatively. It might be a bad faith or a good faith. It might have developed or degraded individual. But life is a sum total of actions choosed by individuals. Erich Fromm is not an existential thinker. He is a German born American psychoanalyst and social philosopher. In his book To Have or to Be Fromm speaks about two concepts- 'Having orientation to Life' and 'Being orientation to life'. Fromm argues that

"the majority of people in Western society focused on a having orientation where the goal of life is to accumulate and own; a being orientation, on the other hand, is about experiencing life. I refer to two fundamental modes of existence, to two different kinds of orientation toward self and the world, to two different kinds of character structure the respective predominance of which determines the totality of a person's thinking, feeling, and acting." (Fromm 24)

So, according to Fromm, "a having orientation, i.e., having a spouse, having a car, home ownership, requires very different values and attitudes toward life, than someone who is oriented towards being, and who experiences joy and fulfillment within daily existence." Hollis is another critic who raises a new issue of "real" life and "authentic" life. According to him "How many of us, arriving at mid-life or later, having done all the "right" things, having served the expectations of our family and our tribe, feel so little at home in our lives" (Hollis 55)? This is a relevant question in the discussion of authentic life. "If the individual

feels his or her life is no longer or perhaps never was authentic then it is not surprising for him or her to experience anxiety and depression” (Grierson 137). “Everything one says about the self should be regarded as tentative, born in swirling mists of conflict and self-conflict...hardly anything can be said that one is not to be tempted to revise or even cancel – most of all, whatever we try to say about interior motives and directions of the soul” (Harper 87).

Thus, it is quite evident that every existence is subjectively explained by individual himself. The challenge for the individual, according to existentialism, is to live the authentic life which each person must define for themselves, and most importantly, to try to avoid the inauthentic life or living in bad faith. “A person is authentic in that degree to which his being in the world is unqualifiedly in accord with the givenness of his own nature and of the world...authenticity is the primary good or value of the existential viewpoint” (Bugental 32). However, “authenticity is a dynamic state of existence and meaning for the individual will change over time as human existence is necessarily contingent.”

Inauthenticity:

‘Inauthenticity’ is labeled as bad faith by Sartre. Bad faith or inauthenticity is an opposite term to ‘authenticity’. Man when starts presupposing that he has been assigned communal role, he forgets that he is free and he should create meaning in his life by accepting choice and responsibility. He starts depending on other social factors. He becomes unsuccessful in thinking for himself. Sartre explains this term in a better way. According to him bad faith is avoidance of choice, freedom and responsibility. Inauthentic existence rejects ‘freedom of choice’. It discards responsibility. Sartre analyses psychologically. He gives an example of the café waiter, the homosexual and the idealistic woman. The café waiter’s existence is inauthentic because it depends on the direction given by the customer. “At the very core of each philosophy has always been the wish to bring fulfillment to the human longing to find the meaning of life. The existentialists have held that such a fulfillment can come not from the creation of thought systems but only in authentic existence. Consequently, unauthentic existence is the direct antipode of fulfillment. It represents deficiency and negativity.” (Breisach 189)

Inauthenticity is also a state of existence. It is closely allied with freedom to choose. In this connection Schrag says, “Freedom provides the ontological basis for inauthenticity and authenticity as possible modes of existence” (O.Schrag 180) He clarifies what mode of existence is authentic and inauthentic in further discussion. “...Man can affirm his freedom through resolute choice and thus attain integrity, or he can abdicate his freedom, neglect to choose, lose his existential centeredness, and succumb to inauthenticity.” (186) Bad faith basically sprouts from the problem of majority of people who do not check the purpose of their being. When a person does not ask himself ‘how should I live?’ means that he continues to live with bad faith. The life in which self assessment process is blocked is an inauthentic existence. Such a person acts with pre assigned principles of being human may be laid by religion, economics, and others. When he prefers to act according to other’s ideals he neither takes credit nor accepts responsibility of his actions. This is a kind of escape. It is an effort to escape from “individual freedom by pretending that human

affairs are unavoidable or necessary, as is the causal order of things” (Lavine 361). Barnes explains in this regards, “...man cannot bear the realization that all the values he lives by, his purposes, his projects are sustained by his own free choice; he finds it too great a strain to accept sole responsibility for his life. Therefore he takes refuge in the belief that somehow the external world is so structured that it guarantees the worth of its objects, it provides specific tasks which have to be done, it demands of each person a definite way of living which is the right one.” Barnes goes a step ahead and highlights the ignorance about free choice in men and women.

Undoubtedly the concept of free choice is not only complex but also unknown to many. The entire philosophers think that human beings are gifted with intellect and it's their duty to examine the purpose of life. Socrates mentions “an unexamined life is not worth living.” The life unexamined is compared with sleepwalking, an unconscious behavior. Self ignorant life is animal life. Human beings should be self aware. They need to find meanings of their life and when this does not happen, those are inauthentic existences. In brief self awareness means to be free and authentic. And opposite to it means self ignorant and dependent is inauthentic or bad faith. “It is said indifferently of a person that he shows signs of bad faith or that he lies to himself... we shall willingly grant that bad faith is a lie to oneself, on condition that we distinguish the lie to oneself from lying in general” (Sartre 48)

This means that we deceive ourselves. We live a life unconsciously and falsely. Though we dislike or like many things we don't reject them or accept them due to social obligations and it is a kind of self deception. On the contrary, ‘civilization thy name is hypocrisy’ is a well established dictum in our society which makes it clear that we deceive ourselves. We don't realise our environment and make decisions. ‘Bad faith’ is the self deceiving and ignorance of an individual about his choices. According to Heidegger inauthenticity is ‘to be untrue to oneself’. Following other persons blindly and living a guided life is inauthentic life. His concept Dasein is analysed by Inwood in connection with authenticity. He raises questions- “Does Heidegger mean that only authentic Dasein is really Dasein, is really a human being? That inauthentic Dasein is not properly human?” (Inwood 26)

He seeks out answer of those questions. He believes authentic and inauthentic are two sides of Dasein. Both are human attributes. One is ‘actual’ and other is ‘own’. Heidegger associates “‘eigentlich’ (actual) with the adjective ‘eigen’ (own) which is used in such contexts as ‘having a room of one’s own’, ‘having a mind of one’s own’, and ‘being one’s own master’. To be authentic is to be true to one’s own self, to be one’s own person, to do one’s own thing.” (26-27) Heidegger also relates inauthenticity and authenticity with death. Those who are appropriately aware of the universal reality of death are authentic and those who are unconscious and unaware about death are inauthentic. Inauthentic people deliberately disregard the only truth of life, death. Authentic people always think about death as inevitable and remain alert for accepting it at any time. “Authentic Dasein runs ahead to its own death...If Dasein runs ahead of its own death, then it can escape the clutches of the ‘they’ and make an authentic choice about its own way of being.” (78)

In the Bhagwad Gita's thirteenth chapter, it is said that one should regularly observe his death. "JANM MRUTYU JARA VYADI DUKHA DOSHANU DARSHANAM" He is considered wise who sees his death every morning. Understanding of death decides the authenticity and inauthenticity of a Dasein. "Difference between authenticity and inauthenticity is that authentic Dasein is not wholly engrossed by the present and by the immediate past and future. Authentic Dasein looks ahead to its death and back to its birth, and beyond its birth to the historical past...Only the present moment exists now, the past no longer exists, and the future does not yet exist. So there are no temporally extended objects or events, no world enduring over time, only an instantaneous temporal slice of a world and of the objects and events within it."(67). In views of Heidegger, falling in 'public dome' and following 'social standards' for living life is inauthenticity. It is a break away from our true self for false and forged public life. This is better explained by Yalom. "Our universal conflict" is that one strives to be an individual, and yet being an individual requires that one endures a frightening isolation. As a result of these feeling of isolation and loneliness, people may take comfort with other people and become negatively dependent on them, resulting in the loss of their individuation." (Yalom 378)

Thus, authenticity is 'good faith', 'being true to oneself', 'being honest', 'being real' and inauthenticity is exactly opposite to this- 'bad faith', being untrue to one self', 'being dishonest' and 'being false'. The discussion of authenticity and its vice versa definitely throws light on the meaning of existence.

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