

Realist Philosophy of Education as a Repetition of Existentialist Theory of Education



Humanities

Keywords: Realist, Philosophy, Education, Existentialist.

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Abstract

The issue bedeviling the various era of philosophy of education made it germane for different philosopher of the respective age to critically address those basic educational issue as there are peculiar to them. The work, sequel to the progressivist tennet juxtaposes existentialist philosophy of education side by side the realist philosophy of education, and argues in support of the claim that realist philosophy of education is a renewal of the existentialist theory of education. It arrives at the conclusion that both system deals with the individual as the center of their postulation, existence preceding essence in their argument and the practical experience as superior to non-experiential knowledge or education. Hence they jettison any claim that is not based on experience and that cannot help the individual attain self-realization. The work uses the analytical, logical, and systematic approach of philosophy to strengthen its argument. And concludes that this awareness will enable scholarship to thrive successfully in philosophy of education.

Introduction

It was Ozumba who asserts in the chapter “Isms in philosophy”, that “the various philosophical schools are founded to enable a beginner in philosophy to appreciate and understand the discipline” (47). These schools house thinkers in philosophy and their submission with regards to the specialization and belief system.

Philosophy of education commonly occur among certain families of subject and is usually treated in in the same category with disciplines that possess related phrases like philosophy of law, philosophy of history (Enukoha, 1). These generally connotes the application of philosophy to the analysis of presumptions and assumption in every field of action and thought. Here, philosophical tools, ideas, knowledge, expertise, methods and findings are being employed to help for optimum clarification, and understanding to serve the interest of the learner.

Thus, our focus in this paper is to exposed existentialism and realism, being some of the outstanding systems in philosophy. Express extensively their educational implication, as well as draw out the debate of repetition of existentialist thought pattern in realist philosophy of education.

Existentialist Philosophy of Education

Throughout much of the 20th century, the analytic approach to philosophy launched by Bertrand Russel dominated philosophical thought in the United State, Great Britain, and other English speaking countries (Stumpf, Socrates, 445). But within continental Europe, philosophy had a different emphasis that took refuge in the movement of phenomenology and existentialism.

It received its definitive expression through the philosophies of Jean – Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau Ponty, Karl Jasper and Gabriel Marcel. They generally subscribed to the view that “existence precede essence. Their interpretation of this is that “a thing first exists before building up its own essence” (Ozumba, 51). For them, philosophical themes such as the “individual”, “freedom”, and the absence of rational understanding of the universe with a consequent dread or sense of absurdity in human life should be emphasized (Blackburn, 25). Aligning with the above thought, Stumpf pointed that:

Whether they were theists or atheist, the existentialists all agreed that traditional philosophy was too academic and remote for life to have any adequate meaning for them. They rejected systematic and schematic thought in favour of a more spontaneous mode of expression in order to capture the authentic concern of concrete existing individuals (Problems 482).

Although there is no system of existentialist philosophy its basis themes can nevertheless, be discovered in some representative existentialist thinkers. Arikpo defined existentialism as the study and collation of knowledge about man, and the meaning of his existence, reality, being, experience and goodness(138). Existentialism sees man as being a meaningless world, where he is completely free to choose his actions and determine his nature. On this note, this effort shall highlight some thinkers in existentialism as well as their educational view.

Soren Kierkegaard

This intelligent existentialist fellow was born in Copenhagen in 1813 to scholarly and pietistic parents. He enrolled at the university of Copenhagen and trained in Hegel’s philosophy, even though at some point he expressed his reservation to it (Stumpf, 356). He did so by aligning with Schelling’s attack on Hegel in his lecture at Berlin.

In Schelling’s lecture as quoted by Stumpf avowed that “if Hegel had written the whole of his logic and then said that it was merely an experiment in thought,” Kierkegaard added, then he could certainly have the greatest thinker who ever lived. As it is, he is merely comic” (Magee, 357). For Kierkegaard, Hegel was comic in the sense that he tried to capture all of reality in his system of thought and, in the process, lost the most important element, namely, existence.

The term existence for Kierkegaard is specifically reserved for human being. That is to say, in his thinking, to exist connotes being a certain kind of individual, one who strives, considers alternatives, chooses, decides and make commitment. He is credited with the saying “Do not be a philosopher in contrast to being a man, do not think as a thinker, think as a living, real being, think in existence” (358). His existential focus hinges on self-consciousness revolt against abstract thought.

In Kierkegaard's philosophy to exist means the ability of an individual to think, and to think in terms of existence. That is to say, we should recognize the fact that we face personal choices, thus our thought should handle immediate situations, more so, the crucial decisions we invariably make.

In life according to Kierkegaard there are two categories of human beings. The spectators and the actors (335). The spectator is an inactive being, while the actor is an active participant in the activities of existence. He therefore admonished the individual on this note, to think instead of to be.

On the subject of truth, Kierkegaard argued that truth is subjective not objective. There is no prefabricated truth out there for individuals who make choices. The only thing that exist out there for Kierkegaard is an objective uncertainty. The more we develop our mind, the more we draw close to authentic truth. And the more we get close to authentic truth, the more we become what we ought to be. This seeming transformational process ends when our cordiality is in assinct with the supreme being – God (360). This process is what Kierkegaard describes in terms of “stages of life's way” (Graver, 156).

For Kierkegaard, there are three stages of life experience; the Aesthetic stage, the Ethical and Religious stage. These represent attitudes towards life, all of them reflects man's attempt to win salvation, gain satisfaction or life's greatest good.

1. The Aesthetic stage: He said in the first stage of life experience, the individual may be either a hedonist in search of pleasure or romance, or intellectual, interested mainly in abstract philosophical speculation. “The focus of the individual is basically sensuous enjoyment, and emotions are dominant” (156).

The hedonist type of Aesthetic person searches for immediate pleasures without regard for the future- living only for the moment. He seeks his satisfactions in erotic fulfillment of desire. A Hedonist will accept romance and sensual gratification, but will not commit himself to conjugal love and marriage, for they represent responsibilities, which he strives from.

2. The Ethical Stage: The futility, meaninglessness and despair of the aesthetic stage should impel the individual to progress to the Ethical stage. The act of genuine choice and decision brings about authentic discovery of purpose. This stage occurs when we have arrived at the universal human, and achieve understanding of our place and purpose in life (156).

Decision is the condition sine quonon by which self is discovered. Kierkegaard asserts that a man facing death will always make the right choice. Anticipation of death, he added, makes a difference in how an individual lives. Here, an individual must live as if each day is the last day, and function accordingly. The Socratic injunction “Know thyself” must be rendered “Man Choose

thyself". Through this inwardness in choosing the self, an authentic selfhood with integrated wholeness is found.

3. The Religious Stage: This is the highest stage. Here, the value to which a man aspires is obedience and commitment to God. The chief distinguishing feature of the inwardness of the religious life is suffering and faith. Selfhood in this context is an achievement, rather than a given human nature.

Since one must exist before he achieves self-hood, therefore, existence is prior to humanity or according to Sartre, existence is prior to essence. It is in religious life that commitment reaches the peak and the other two stages reach their culmination. In the thinking of Sartre, just as a despairing person advances from the aesthetic to the ethical stage, so now the alienated person progresses from the ethical to the religious stage.

Kierkegaard asserts that education should be subjective and religious, and devotedly channeled towards developing individuality and the individual's relationship with God (156). His educational thought stands contrary to vocational and technical studies, because for him, these studies are directed towards the secular world of objectivity.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980)

Jean-Paul Sartre, a French philosopher, novelist, and dominant French intellectual was born in pains (Blackburn, 327). His father Jean Batiste, a naval officer died when Sartre was fifteen months old, and Sartre and his mother Anne Marie Schweitzer had to join her parents (Lawhead, 546).

He noted that, "he began his life as he shall no doubt end it." This was because the suffocating atmosphere of his grandfather's household was filled with books. Thus he had no general child-hood experience except with the daily interaction with books.

From being tutored at home, he attended the prestigious Ecole Normale Superieure, with particular interest in Hegel's phenomenology, after which he began his career teaching philosophy at a number of high schools. Routledge described him as "a philosopher of paradox; an existentialist who attempted a reconciliation with marxism and a theorist of freedom who explored the motion of predestination" (793). His existential fame cuts across cultures and climbs, owing to his consistency of thought and works. Some of the basic themes in Sartre's existential philosophy includes; Existence precedes essence, Freedom and responsibility, nothingness and bad faith and human consciousness.

Existence Precedes Essence

In his lecture, Sartre presented a lucid articulation of the phrase “Existence Precedes Essence,” which is now attached to existentialist primary tennet.

Explaining this phrase Sartre affirms that “we are without meaning at the point of birth, and it is left for us to fashion our own meaning in the world in any way we deem fit” (Carver, 160). He further explained that if there is no God, no first cause, therefore there is nothing to prevent us from becoming whatever we so desire. The premise for this conclusion hinges on the fact that there is no predetermined self – essence.

The significance of this statement is that we create ourselves, and at the same time responsible for our growth and development. The individual that is in existence possess the consciousness that he is the maker of his will, actions and inactions. He is thrown into the world to carve-out his purpose, and to fulfill it according to his dictates without accounting for how he lived his life.

Freedom and Responsibility

Sartre made a case that “Everything is possible because man is absolutely free, or better put, man is condemned to be free (Carver, 161). Man’s freedom has no limitations; he is free to make any kind of choice that resonates with the will.

Concomitantly, Sartre maintained that for every choice, there is equal and opposite reaction. That is, an individual is responsible for the aftermath of his decisions. Again, he frowns at the attribution of lives consequences to God, saying that it’s man who took the decision which invariably result to the supposed consequences.

He buttressed his point, by stating that “there is nothing beside the existing individual, no God, no objective system or values, no build-in essence and no determinism” (465). A person is equivalent to freedom. We find ourselves thrown in the world, our freedom begins as soon as we become conscious of who we are, and start taking responsibilities for our actions.

Nothingness and Bad Fate

Sartre contends that there is no predetermined fate for any individual, we are a reflection of our mental construct. “There is no prior essence in all people, no human nature, no universal human condition” (Stumpf, 466). When we invent values as individual being, for him, this is a confirmation that there is no meaning or sense in life prior to act or will. That is to say, life is nothing until it is lived. Value becomes the infusion of a rational being into life.

In his thinking it is bad fate, when we argue that we are the victims of fate, of mysterious forces within us, of some grand passion, or heredity. All human beings are guilty, in principle of similar inauthenticity of bad fate. The conclusion of Sartre's existentialism is, therefore, that if I express my genuine humanity in all my behavior I will never deceive myself, and honesty will then become not my ideal, but my very being.

Human Consciousness

In Sartre's technical analysis of existentialism, he used the concept "being-in-itself, which connotes the mere fact that a thing exists or is in existence. Secondly, he analyzed the concept being-for-itself, which connotes for him, existing as a conscious subject. This dimension of existing is particularly peculiar to human being and not other being."

Sartre argues moreso, that the world and its contents is incomprehensible without human consciousness. "The world of things appears as an intelligible system of separate and interrelated things only to consciousness" (467). Without consciousness, the world simply is, and as such without meaning. Therefore, the mental realization of object and subject constitute the meaning of things in the world.

Realist Philosophy of Education

Realism according to Ozumba," is the doctrine that the world is real as it is presented to us in experience"(49).That is to say, whatever object that resonates with our senses is as real as it appears to us. Consequently, as idea cannot be taken to be real until it is subdued into concrete representation in experience.

Furthermore, the doctrine is better explained in types and epoch. For the types, there is naïve realism, scientific realism, social realism, legal realism, etc. while the epoch expresses the message of each existential period in philosophy accordingly.

Naïve realism posits that object are as real as they appear to the senses, which connotes that our senses provides us with reliable information about external reality. Reality for them is one, appearance is equivalent to reality. For the scientific realist, the real goes beyond the physical object to include the existence of such scientific existence such as entities like atoms, neutron, force, gravity and magnetic field (49). We will need the help of object like Microscope and telescope to see these entities.

Realist Philosophers of Educaation and it's Tenet Aristotle Realist Philosophy of Education

It was Aristotle who developed the view that while ideas may be important in themselves, a proper study of matter could lead us to better and more distinct ideas. Aristotle said the most important question we can ask about things relate to their purpose or function.

For him, since humans are the only creatures endowed with the abilities to think, their purpose is to use this ability. Thus we achieve our true purpose when we think, and we go against this end when we do not think or think intelligently. He noted that there is design and order in the universe, for things happen in an orderly way.

The man who follows his true purpose lead a rational life of moderation avoiding extremes. His notion of the golden mean is illustrated by his concept of the soul as an entity to be kept in a balance. He spoke of the three aspect of the soul being, the vegetative, Animalistic and Rational part.

When a man uses his reason to keep his vegetative and animal aspects in harmony, he is following the path for which he was designed and is fulfilling his purpose. He believes that a good education helps to achieve the Golden mean and thereby promotes the harmony and balance of both the body and soul.

Aristotle's Four Causes

1. The material cause- The matter from which something is made
2. The formal cause- The design that shapes the material object
3. The efficient cause- The agent that produces the object
4. The final cause- The direction towards which the object is intentionally designed.

The chief good for Aristotle is happiness, and happiness is dependent upon a virtues and well-ordered soul. And this can only come about as we develop habits of virtue that are shaped through the proper kind of education. Education necessitates the development of our reasoning capacity so that we can make the right kind of choices.

Although he did not go into specific details about his educational ideas, he felt that the proper character would be formed by following the golden mean. This would result in proper social development, and would assist the state in producing and nurturing good citizens in the polity.

Religious Realism

The ideas of Aristotle were incorporate into Christianity and provided it with a philosophical base. Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225-11274), a leading authority in Medieval philosophy is said to have Christianized Aristotle's realism. Concerning his proof about the existence of God, he argued that since God is pure reason, then the universe is reason, and by uniting our reason, as Aristotle suggested, we could know the truth or thing.

He laid emphasis on using our senses in order to obtain knowledge about the world . For him, God created matter out of nothing and God was, as Aristotle stated, the unmoved mover who gave meaning and purpose to the universe.

On the subject of truth, he said all truth were externally in God. Truth was passed from God to man through diverse revelation, but God had also endowed man with the reasoning ability to seek out truth. He views theology as the primary concern and philosophy as the handmaiden of theology. By recognizing the supremacy of theology he was able to explore the philosophy of religious though more fully.

Aquinas views on education are consistent with his philosophical position. Accordingly knowledge can be gained from sense data, and it can lead one to God, provided the learner views it in the proper perspective. In essence, on learning, he posits that one should proceed from the study of matter to form. Contradistinctively, he disagree with Augustine that one can only know God through intuition and faith, but that man can use his reason to reach God through a study of the material world.

Consequently, he believed that proper education is one that fully recognizes both the spiritual and material nature of man. He was strongly in favour education of man's soul.

Modern Realism

One of the problem of classical realism was its failure to develop an adequate method of inductive thinking. They often had their truth hand, never doubted that there was first cause or an unmoved mover. Modern realism developed out of attempt to cure such error – the heart of scientific revolution.

Francis Bacon (1561-1626) was a renowned politician and philosopher. His most famous work was the "Novum organum", in which he challenged Aristotle's logic. He said the Aristotelian logic adopted theological method of thoughts. He charged that science cannot proceed by way of a priori and assumption.

Rather, he contends that science must be purely concerned with inquiry, not burdened with preconceived develop a reliable method of enquiry. He pointed out that we could be feed from dependence on the occurrence of infrequent gemises and could develop knowledge through the use of a method.

Bacon belief that knowledge is power. And it is only through knowledge that we can more effectively deal with the problem and force besetting us. To do this, he devised a method called "the inductive method".

He stated against Aristotle's precepts that through deduction one might also alter beliefs, but when one begins with absolute truth he is less likely to change them than when he begins with Neutral data. Siting the historical example of Galileo and the church concerning the position of the earth in the solar system, Bacon maintained that the scientific or inductive approach uncover many errors in proposition that had originally been taken for granted, we should reexamine all our previously accepted knowledge.

At the very least we should attempt to rid our minds of various ideas that becloud our thinking. He adumbrated them to include;

Idols of the Den: where we believe things because of our own limited experiences.

Idols of the Tribe: whereby we tend to believe things because most people believe in them.

Idol of the market place: This idol deals with language, for words are often used in such a way that prevent understanding.

Idols of the theatre: Idols of our religion and philosophies that may prevent us from seeing the world objectively.

Hence, he called for a house-keeping of the mind where we can break away from the dead ideas of the past and begin again by using the method of induction – the logic of arriving at generalization on the basis of systematic observations of particulars.

John Locke (1632 – 1704). Sought to explain how we develop knowledge. He traced the origin of ideas to the object of thought or whatever the mind entertains. For him, there are no such things as ideas. At birth the mind is like a blank sheet of paper, a tabula rasa, upon which ideas are imprinted.

All knowledge is gotten from sources independent of the mind. In other words, all ideas are derived from experience by way of sensation and reflection. External object exists, and are characterized by two kinds of qualities: primary (solidity size and motion) and secondary (color, taste, smell, sound, and other sense qualities). His view on education are documented in his work *Some thoughts concerning education*.

Contemporary Realism

Two of the most outstanding figures in contemporary realism were Alfred North-Whitehead and Bertrand Russell.

Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) attempted to reconcile some aspect of idealism with realism, thereby reconstructing the philosophical bases of Modern science. Some of his major statements on education are found in the *Aims of education*. He preferred realism as a philosophy because he thought it help man correct the excesses of subjective thought.

He rejected of thesis of independence, and said sees objective reality and subjective mind as absolutely separate. They are together in an organized unity or pattern. Philosophy to him is simply a search for pattern in the universe.

On education, he post that the important things to learn are ideas. He contends with the fact that these ideas should be sacrosanct with the leaners experience, useful and capable of being articulated. This shows his organic orientation, that education should enable us to get into the flow of existence, the process-patterns of reality.

Realising as a Philosophy of Education

Education has always been used as a way of teaching essentials to people. The need for knowing these essentials is no less today argues the realist. Realist educationalist such as Harry Brondy would like teachers to take critical look at what they are doing.

They admit memorization, learning of fact, problem solving objectives, projects and enjoyable experiences that should be fruitful in terms of producing students with needed knowledge and skills. They would like to see our institutions of higher learning produce models for future training.

Realist put great emphasis on th practical side of education, and their concept of practical includes education for moral and character development. – john Lock, Johaan F. Herbert and Herbert Spencer all held that the chief aim of education should be moral education.

Method of Realism

Secular realist emphasis empirical fact as method of teaching; the realist believe less in the personality of the teacher than in the effectiveness of the teacher to impact knowledge about the world that student can see. They support the lecture method and other experiential ways of teaching, like John Locke pointed out that play is a district way of learning.

Existentialist Philosphy of Education as Revisted by the Realist

To bring to fore this epistemology, it is pertinent to articulate the objective of both school of thoughts in education. Faced with this dilemma, Dufrenne asserts in his article on Existentialism Vs Realism. What's the difference? Existentialism emphasize the uniqueness of each human existence in freely making its self-defining choices, while realism is a concern for fact or reality and rejection of the impractical and visionary” (51). He affirms that realism in education has dragged the education from the old tradition, idealism and the high and low ideas to the real surface.

For the existentialist, education should provide more insight into those experiences which man is most aware of the human condition, and the real life experience. No subject is more important, subject should become tools for self-realization. therefore the purpose of education should be for self-discovery. And a student is a free thinking conscious agent, that developed in the direction he chooses his existence to be.

Hence, the task of a teacher is to tell the student to choose the knowledge that best appeal to his purpose, being or existence.

While according to Maheshwari, “realism is the refinement of our common acceptance of the world as being just what it appears to be.” Things are essentially what they seem to be, in our knowledge, there are just the same as they were before entering our consciousness” (269). What he is saying, reveals that, for the realist knowledge is as it is. it does not change by us experiencing it.

The realist like the existentialist maintain the position that, “the learner is a sense mechanism, the teacher is a demonstrator, the curriculum as the subject matter of the physical world, the teaching method as mastering fact and information, and the social policy of the school as transmitting the settled knowledge of western civilization” (270).

The realist also affirms that the student should be exposed to factual knowledge, and information for self-mastery. Morality for them would be found in the basis of nature and the order of the physical world. That is to say, whatever is true or real must correspond with simple observation matter.

Philosophizing on the cardinal aim of education for the realist, Maheswari attenuates that “the realist do not belief in a general aim of education, aim for them are specific to each individual and his perspectives”(271). And like the existentialist, each individual has different perspective according to the realist. The aim of education should therefore be to teach truth and the strategies to understand the practical life.

Conclusion

Steaming from the foregoing of this epistle “sine qua non”, the philosophy of education as a repetition of the existentialist theory of education, it is glaring that the both system shares common features. Existentialism vis-a-vis Realism celebrates man as the center of its discuss, and argues in support of the truism that man first exist before chatting a course for his essence and who he desires to be. They both analyzed the common milieu of the freedom of individual, the individual as a conscious entity and the individual as the author and finisher of education. Following suit, they periscope education as the creation and conglomeration of an individual’s reality through his interaction with the practical life. existentialist as well as the realist debunk any knowledge founded on the weak bearing of ideas. For them, knowledge is knowledge only if it

appeals to our senses. All through the exploration of the thoughts of Kierkegaard, Sartre, Aristotle, Aquinas, Bacon and other existentialist and realist philosophers respectively, as articulated in this paper, not forgetting their education views. We can dare to argue glaringly, that realism's tenet, aim, and foundation is a repetitive build-up of existentialism. This is so on the account that realism gives credence to the physical, practical and existential. As against the spiritual, non-physical and intangible reality of idealism. And this in a nutshell is the core of existentialism, which objectively spells-out the principle nature of "existence preceding essence," the freedom of the learner to make conscious choices and the succinct reliability on experience or practical life against ideological or theoretical pattern of human life.

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