



## REFLECTION ON EXISTENCE: A CRITICAL VIEW

Patrick Neil M. Santiago

**Abstract**– *Life becomes absurd when an individual gets controlled by certain deception as he/she is fettered to such deceit by the few. Most people become victims of the illness of this society caused by some predators whose fangs have bitten the majority. This paper investigates the fresh consciousness of a child, encountering the self-influenced and reshaped by the values of the mass, surged up and defined through his environment to affirm the present condition that appears absurdity. Finally, the deprivation of man in his freewill as a result of deceit from his society is found absurd. Hence, the investigation falls on the conclusion that man is a victim of the illness of society and his freedom should always be accompanied by responsibility.*

**Keyword**– *absurdity, existence, freedom, reflection, responsibility, self, will.*

### I. INTRODUCTION

The splendid genealogy of man's creation has been considered as the eminent being next to God in the biblical context. Among all creations, man is the only creature that has been enlivened with a living soul that embodies being, mind, and actions. These three aspects of man give essence to his existence. A compendium of philosophical and anthropological phenomena has given innumerable thoughts on man's *being* and *mind* from many great thinkers from ancient to contemporary times. However, the most compelling element of man remains to be the pinnacle of his very essence–his actions.

Every individual is transfigured to become a powerful being and born free. He/she has the freedom to explore and acquire meaningful life. Every being possesses nothing but the faculty of the mind. It is his/her duty to exercise freewill as he/she faces life and terrible fate. Hence, he/she is the only accountable being in controlling self over the future. However, in this present condition occurs absurdity. In this regard, there are inevitable questions that should be clarified such as: How a man should attach his existence to his physical world? Who hinders and stagnates an individual to exercise his freewill? Who/what influences an individual which can reshape his moral thoughts? And how does man intend to define his image and dignity?

### II. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a critical analysis method of understanding, analyzing, and synthesizing issues about existence to explore and affirm its present notions, facets, and effects to humanity. This method was adopted from J.L. Beyer. According to [1] “a critical analysis is subjective writing because it expresses the writer's opinion or evaluation of a text which was broken down into parts”. The chief intent of this inquiry is to identify and explain the problem on the present condition of man's deprivation in his freewill as a result of deceit from his society



that appears absurd and to provide substantial insights, inspirations, and illumination to its readers.

### III. ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

#### A. Sartre's Freedom and Responsibility

Existence precedes essence [2]. This premise is the basic principle of existentialism by the French philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980). Sartre asserted that man exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world, and defines himself afterward [2]. What he is more concerned with, is dealing with the possession of subjective life [2]. Man presumably seeks for life's meaning and purpose. He freely deliberates his will and the things he purposes for his own life. Hence, the self is a conscious being and has the capability to control over the future. Moreover, the most significant point of putting in the position existence as prior to essence in humanity is not just centered on the achievement of *self*-desires but also on the existence of responsible treatment on each individual [2]. If a man remains stagnant or mediocre without weighing things around him, then he becomes an irresponsible creature and absurd.

Sartre discussed individual freedom and responsibility. He was clarifying that the *wills* of man are a conscious decision as we are accountable for. As individuals, we are the ones who make ourselves [2]. Sartre postulates that when an individual chooses in the course of making himself, he chooses not only for himself but also for all people [2]. Man is, therefore, responsible not only for his own individuality but also for the sake of the majority. To some extent, Sartre emphasized that as we have the will to exist, we fashion our image. This image is valid for all and for the entire epoch in which we find ourselves [2]. As Sartre cites this example:

*If I decide to marry and to have children, even though this decision proceeds simply from my situation, from my passion or my desire, I am thereby committing not only myself, but humanity as a whole, to the practice monogamy, I am thus responsible for myself and for all men, and I am creating a certain image of man as I would have him to be. In fashioning myself I fashion man [2].*

The action of man is in accordance to his will in order to create himself, posit values that he believes ought to be as for the betterment not only of oneself but of all in which creates an image of humanity. What we did to our life affirms the values that we have chosen but nothing is good to anyone unless it was good for mankind as a whole[3].

But how does absurdity appear in this present condition of our society? How does society violate the principle of existentialism dealing with responsibility and human freedom? Hereunder are helpful and enlightening thoughts that may educate and nourish one's way of thinking that may lead to rightful actions and sound decision making.



### ***B. Early Consciousness***

Most psychoanalysts believe that human behavior is a product that starts from early consciousness, childhood to later age [4]. Once a newborn becomes a child, his main concern is to eat and play. As he grows, he will then inevitably follow the system imposed by his state and institutions like government, church, and school. The child enters such institutions to become educated. As the process of educating the young evolves, he will start to think about existence and his essence. He will ask himself and seek truth, then the genes and environment dictate and influence his actions and decisions. He then becomes confused and eager to search for an antidote to cure such illness. One of these is religion. One can assume that religion is the most influential element in this physical world which no one can easily escape from. The child engages in this institution at his very young age up to his old age. He is often deceived by eloquent speakers through their convincing and promising arguments that affect one's beliefs and cause factions to the many.

### ***C. Confrontation on Himself***

Sartre emphasized that we are accountable for ourselves, [2] and that we are the ones who make ourselves and create own values for our existence. But what if the religious institution devised by the few control the natural innocence of a child and poison his young mind? The context of existence speaks of things based on experience and does not accentuate imaginative and fictitious beliefs. This challenges everyone and tends to placate the anguished soul. This topic may cover issues and perspectives that are thought-provoking, enraging the soul, awakening the senses, and breaking the spirit to make it more holistic and rounded.

*On Existence* reflects the actual state and journey of the self and impacts the way of life thereby proving deeper appreciation of man's existence on this earth.

There was a boy who was seeking life's meaning and lost himself in deep confusion. He had a long time listening and meditating in their place. In his solitude, he was challenged by his seven devils. The people despised him in many aspects that led him to ask: "Who am I? What am I doing? Am I insane? Am I evil?"

The first thing he encountered is religion. He was born Catholic but at a young age, he encountered a priest that he could never forget because of his confusion on religion. He grew up with different neighbors, with a variety of beliefs, different religions, and subconsciously absorbed different doctrines. He despised himself for being a Catholic by questioning some practices such as bowing to statues, graven images and doing some symbolic practices like the sign of the cross religiously. But his conscience spoke to himself and said he was a Catholic. But the boy was wholly confused with such a phenomenon. This led him to study hard and find antelope for his confusion on Catholicism.

The second event he encountered was when he fell in love with his neighbor. Due to the existence of different religions in his time, the choices were limited and there was less



opportunity. Religious doctrines are much sacred and are bound by some restraints, and leaders prefer their members to have an affair with the same faith. This gave a thorough motivation to this boy to enter another religion, a purposive attempt to change his faith determined to initiate a gesture of courtship. Such so-called “divine leaders” dictated and manipulated the lives of their members in accordance with the will of God. His experience inside the new religion became unusual and made him totally alienated from the new world. From this affiliation, Catholic members are viewed to have already been condemned as evil. They always give innumerable criticisms to Catholicism and its doctrines; speaking of rude remarks was like a feasting ceremony that everyone engrossedly enjoyed.

In this church, this boy just listened and observed its customs and teachings from its leaders and preachers. As he listened, he heard beyond the words of these preachers, he read beyond the lines of the passages and he saw beyond the eyes that surpassed until the limits of these preachers’ soul to the bottom hidden filth of themselves. Every time he tried to mingle with this group, he felt that he was the “Evil Catholic” that they have condemned to the strongest offense. His conscience could not digest bitter words that he saw fraud and vain things. The divine spoke of righteous matters to him and acted like a truly divine being. Their eyes looked at him that seemed he was their enemy because he was the devil, seeing themselves as if new angels descended from above and the only divine creatures ever lived. He was truly despised and treated like he knew nothing about the Bible or even God. The boy tried to share what he had seen in the preacher’s soul to awaken and save the girl whom he had been courting, but unfortunately, he failed to pursue such an act. Instead of being given a chance to be listened to, he was declined and despised by the girl. The boy could not accept the reality that the girl was already fettered by doctrines. Her self is closed to the possibility of falling in love with the new blood, not to entertain neighbor outside of the same faith. He was envious of the preachers because the girl was completely amazed by their teachings. He was absolutely obsessed with that girl but he could not just pretend, lie, and ignore the false belief that had pressed him to deceitful and foolish doctrines. This boy was in unbearable sorrow and pain with confusion and anguished soul. The questions, “Why is it not allowed to love others with different religious orientation?”, “Is this love?”, “Why can’t a person follow his feelings for someone?” and “Why do people allow inhumane religious leaders to govern their fate and faith?” have led the boy to wonder in deep contemplation and anguish. Leaders imposed such doctrines in favor of their desires over God’s will. To the boy, such teaching is selfish and absurd. The boy felt a kind of injustice and he could not explain why such things happened. He was truly frustrated to achieve justice for love. He just wanted to be honest to himself and to be loved by the one he loved the most.

From the story above, it is not accounted for whether the boy succeeded in his pursuit of love nor failed to follow it. The main point of the above story is to highlight objectivity over subjectivity; how his perspective gave utmost importance to the foregoing dilemma of society, of culture, and life in general. Moreover, Sartre stressed that man is a being who has greater dignity



as opposed to a non-living thing such as stone [2]. This simply means that the stone cannot be responsible, unlike a human who possesses life, capability, and power to do something. If an individual will never be responsible for his very own self, then he is nothing but a piece of a hard rock that eventually decomposes.

The story is also in consonance with the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's (1844–1900) essay, *Of the Tree on the Mountainside* in which the young man is confused about himself due to his seeking for truth and rising in the heights but bringing him into darkness[5]. This concept reiterates the words of Lao Tzu (circa 640–524 BCE) that man's conduct should depend on their instinct and conscience and his wish to create other men is based on his image[6]. This postulates that what man desires to do is the fate he can become in the future. The mind commands action and decision. This is seen on the impulse of man, like what Nietzsche said that the mighty commander of the unknown sage called *self*-lives in everyone's body [5] and this remains true to every human being—man has always a *will* and desire to become a creator.

#### ***D. Influence on Moral Thoughts***

Another element is the booming explosion of information and technology. Media has become the most influential source of information. It reshapes the values of individuals and influences the perspective of everyone [7]. Through this, perversion on existence becomes more illusive—good becomes evil, then evil becomes good, from morality to immorality, holiness to ungodliness, and saints to sinners. Realistically, there is no constant standard on what is good and evil. No one then has the right to condemn Robin Hood for doing the evil things for good results, or soldiers killing human beings to maintain peace and order of the state. Just consider the values from other cultural heritage such as the primitive world, the tribe of the Ilongot for example where the male Ilongot hunts to get a human head that serves as an offering or gift to female Ilongot as part of courtship manner to prove his status and sincerity. Such practice must not be accused and condemned as a satanic custom for the tribe of Ilongot because it conforms to their cultural identity, a satisfaction of beliefs that bind all the members of the tribe, and governing law that rules its people. This might scandalize the assumptions of the majority pertaining to some set of standards of law created by man.

While the great majority enjoys the good benefits of technology in this digital world, many are unaware of its harmful effects on life. Media is described as extending the capacity to perceive things in this physical world. It is an extension of the human senses. The outcomes brought by media have easily spread, reshaped, and affected the learned values of the majority[7]. For instance, a film or movie, a sort of inspiring stories that admire Hoodlums, Mafias or a Gang, ideas that influence, reshape, build or constitute values showing virtues from the forms of violence and crimes such as thieves, murder, and prostitution. This phenomenon rises above the basic laws classified by John Locke (1632–1704) such as Divine law, Civil law,





and Public Opinion or Community law[8]. If violence, for instance, is the mainstream of media reflecting the public opinion of the majority of community, it then violates the Divine law or Civil law to oppose violence.

The information brought by media is subjected to a dictate, an imposition caused by media. Nietzsche called this weak context of morality as *Slave morality*, a product of repression [9] and convalescent[5]. Poverty is viewed as a massive reality. The media uses this approach to control the morality of the majority. Everyone relates to the concept of suffering brought by poverty. They enjoy stories of violence, cruelty where the mind can revenge over the strong ones. Media unconsciously develop an idea that cannot be surpassed. This hinders man to pursue his personal growth and empowerment. This is the very reason why media is perceived as a giant influencer to the morality of human beings.

### ***E. Emergence and Definition of Selves***

After adopting certain systems such as following rules of institutions, weighing situations from the environment, and searching for truth, man tends to choose from his own will in order to solve confusions and sustain his frustrations. As this child grows into a man, he will surpass different thinking which is believed to depend on the composition of his body and the inevitable influences of his environment and the physical world he lives in. He tends to pursue his ambitions, wills, and intentions whatever it takes even risking the good or evil actions for his deepest desire just to achieve success. The values he adopts become the fate of his will. Hence, the conscience speaks to the self that initiates judgment.

The significance of formal education in the academic or religious groups as an assurance for future desire may be observed. Basically, success is about achievements, but it varies on how a person achieves this. This also depends on the contingent flow of one's life and contentment of the self. In this material world, the significance of wealth and power always prevails. Usually, wealth and power dominate on man's existence and civilization that whatever or whoever is the self, he will have the hunger to have these possessions; however, nobody gets satisfied and contented with what he has achieved. The man continues to attain more, profit bigger and aspire larger resources to ensure power and position. This is a clear convalescent. The existence is an opportunity of examination to its essence[5]. From this point of view, it is inevitable to raise the dilemma of the concept of *essence*. This is indeed the foundation of reason which is another skeptical issue that clings to this notion of existence. As an existentialist, it is with much attachment to explore the possibility of absurdity to examine the mystery of existence and deeply understand the significance and essence of being. Existence always clings to an essence. It is not just a matter of questioning one's occurrence, but a demand to search for an answer for this occurrence. However, the limitation of cognition will be the fate of frustration towards absurdity.



### ***F. Fate of Life***

The concept of essence remains skeptical in scientific reasoning. In a wider evaluation, the essence could inevitably lead to the conclusion that flows to absurdity. Thus, the basis of absurdity is *time*. All forms of beings cannot deny the fact that this physical world has its ending. Then, it is the limitation of being why it caused people to become absurd. It is believed that the assumption of essence as the absurd concept is discriminated and despised. It is just a matter of false belief on the basis or parameter to reject this significance. Logically, to make it simple, man faces the fate of his existence whether this existence brings unbearable struggles and testing, and believes that his essence matters as he continues to live. On the contrary, by ending his matter to live through suicide, he declines his life proving that he does not believe in his essence. The contributions of past civilization with its great ancestors loudly echo to this present time which Nietzsche stressed as the spirits or legacy [5]. The sacrifice and endeavor of the genius and selfless ancestors will not be in vain. Their shadows remain as the spirit of their heroism circulates to the world, and continues to live all throughout the coming generations.

The idea of essence is just a clear proof of optimism and a figure of profound hope after death. As argued above, such absurdity does exist. Essence might be a limited concept in this physical world that relies on everyone's assumption. However, it is believed that there is nothing wrong with accepting the limits of physical assumption concerning essence. The qualities or limitations of essence are not the parameters to reject a person's significance in this world. Living is such a pleasurable thing. It is a right to enjoy and a gift to cherish. Therefore, the result of everything we do is a product of our action and that is anchored on the so-called essence.

At the end of everyone's struggles is the natural instinct of man for contentment as he seeks for pleasure, meaning, and hope for physical world and success may just fall into whatever he intends to conquer and achieve, whatever he thinks to earn whether wealth or power or whatever he endeavors to achieve. The essence of existence will fall into the fate of nothingness and might realize the absurdity of the so-called life. It is because man is aware of this inevitable ending, of his limitations, feebleness, and impotence. Human crafted a medicine that cures his anxiousness [10]. Everybody relies on the beliefs that may forge his/her will and this will is transformed into the concept of religion.

## **IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

In the first discussion, the principle of existentialism stresses that man is the autonomous being of his existence. Man created his image that eventually constitutes his essence. This shows that we are the authors of our essence. We create ourselves and at the same time, we also create images of our being with the dignity of humanity. Moreover, it is also found out that there is an association between freedom and responsibility. Hence, man is accountable for his being and his action and decision.



The contradicting elements such as institutions, religion, law, media, morality, instinct, and others are the forces that stagnate and hinder the freedom of humanity. The innocence, ignorance, and irrational beliefs were perverted by the predators of this society who took advantage of others' vulnerability and castrated human capabilities. Instead of seeking truth, meaning, and purpose they were fettered and forced to follow a leader. In relevance to the story of a young man, this obviously shows that he is the real victim of the illness in society. People confine themselves in the customs, irrational and delusional beliefs, and reconstructed knowledge of other predators.

With the deception, corruption, and deprivation brought by such institutions, people adopt filth and resentment values from media and take the illness in the society, as a result, people became evil. The latter behavior of people explicitly appears as a product of their environment. Having been manipulated by society, man deliberates to acquire wealth and power that will place him to be a leader. A leader that controls over the rights and powers of others. To him, this is an achievement of success as an emblem of power in this physical world. In the later stage of life, everyone encounters the anxious fate of a mortal body– death. All forms of successes that they achieved will soon fall into nothingness. Hence, man relies on to hope after death that anchors his fate through religion.

Finally, it is said that man's absurdity occurs when he lets himself manipulated by such deceits of the few. On the other hand, if a man exercises his freewill but fails to regard the consequence of it, then he would never be responsible for his actions and decisions, self and people as a whole. Nevertheless, one thing explicitly appeared absurd, man is a victim of the illness of society. Thus, the will of man is superior, extreme, excessive but evil.

## **V. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

In his utmost gratitude, the author wishes to acknowledge with profound gratitude his wife Nenita and his daughters: Sophia and Athena as well as his father Orestes and his brother Ronald who always serve as his inspiration in life's undertaking and take care of him especially in his dark and challenging times.

The author would like to commemorate his beloved mother Cholita and his baby daughter Avesta who now rest in the hands of God Almighty. They will be always cherished, treasured and loved. They will ever remain alive in the heart of the author and will never be forgotten.





## VI. REFERENCES

- [1]. Critical Analysis. Retrieved on December 15, 2020 from <https://www2.southeastern.edu/Academics/Faculty/elejeune/critique.htm>.
- [2]. Sartre, Jean–Paul. *Existentialism and Humanism*, trans. and intro., Philip Mairet, London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1966.
- [3]. McCabe, Herbert. *On Aquinas*, ed. and intro., Brian Davies, London: Burns & Oats, 2008.
- [4]. Greenwald Harold, ed., with intro. and notes, *Great Cases in Psychoanalysis*, New York: Ballantine Books, Inc, 1959.
- [5]. Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. with an intro., R. J. Hollingdale, England: Penguin Books Ltd., 1961, 1969.
- [6]. Bynner, Witter. trans., *The Way of Life: According to Lao Tzu*, New York: The Berkley Publishing Group, 1994.
- [7]. Santiago, Patrick Neil M. “Critical Study on Delusional *Ressentiment*: The Case of Filipino Community”. *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences (IJELS)*, 5, no. 6 (2020): 2104–2109.
- [8]. Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Pennsylvania, PA: State University Press, 1999.
- [9]. Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic*, trans. with an intro. and notes, Douglas Smith, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- [10]. Santiago, Patrick Neil M. “Critical Analysis on Death: From Deluded Fancy to Desired Ecstasy”. *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences (IJELS)*, 3, No. 5, (2018): 826–831.