

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research study is to establish through a symptomatic study of Jean-Paul Sartre's major novels, that Existentialism is not a nihilistic philosophy but is an active philosophical vision of life - individual and social; with a concern to individual and societal values: a moral philosophy like Utopia, but of course by virtue of an entirely different schema and mechanism. The Utopian philosophy deals with very fundamental societal issues such as: how to make work more rewarding, leisure more abundant and communities more friendly. It, in other words, gives us a vision of everyday life. Ever since Plato, Western thinkers had dreamed of ideal societies. This urged humanity to something to aspire for — noble, beautiful visions of what society might one day be like. All the major visions of Utopia place far greater importance on more and more mundane matters such as nature of work, leisure and the structure of local communities, than they do on the grand questions of governance. Utopian philosophy incorporates itself in literature very strongly. The careers of utopian philosophies Plato's *The Republic* and Thomas More's *Utopia* are great works of literature as well. Besides, utopian thought's emphasis on individual and social concerns makes it an integral part of the study of novel as genre. As novel is the only form which celebrates and gives full room to such horizons. The characters in a novel aspire for a perfect state of affairs and expose their ethics, values, and ideals of life. The novelist through the dramatization of these values conveys his moral vision of life. The novel hence, becomes an exposition of contrasting ideologies where of course the author's intentionality has a vivid presence and force. One such writer is Jean-Paul Sartre.

Sartre's writings bear the stamp of his experience from the outset. Sartre is not saintly but aggressively human; he does not preach disenchantment but commitment in the world. He believes that all we are is the result of what we have thought. According to his commitment with 'earthly life': Man is free; but his freedom does not look like the glorious liberty of the Enlightenment; it is no longer the gift of God. Man stands alone in the universe, responsible for his condition, likely to remain in a lowly state, but free to reach above the stars. Sartre has taken up the passionate concern with questions that arise from life, the moral pathos, and the firm belief that, to be serious, a philosophy has to be lived. The strategy of 'indirect communication' has been an instrument of Existentialists. The point is to communicate a feeling and an attitude that the reader! spectator adopts in which certain existentialist themes such as anguish, responsibility or bad faith are suggested but not dictated as in a lecture. Sartre's *Nausea* (1938) is the very model of a philosophical novel. It works through many of the major themes of Being and Nothingness In a series of essays published as *What is Literature* (1947) Sartre expounds his notion of 'committed' literature, as writing according to Sartre's pragmatism, is a form of acting in the world and it produces effects for which the author must assume responsibility. Sartre is a highly conscious artist who writes deliberately with an awareness that his fictionalized worlds must not challenge his theoretical stand points. He aims at approaching the consciousness of the reader through a fictionalization of his theory. Sartre skillfully offers an interpretational space where a reader's mind must fill in the gaps provided in the text, to understand and communicate with the writer's consciousness and of characters as well. This play allows the reader to grasp the philosophical ideology working in his novels.

In both philosophy and literature, much of the best original work being done exploits the connections and tensions between these two disciplines. Modern literary theory increasingly looks to philosophy for its inspiration, as the influence of deconstructive and hermeneutic readings demonstrates. Hermeneutics focuses on 'understanding' rather than on 'explanation' as E. D. Hirsch suggests that the interpreter of a text has a moral duty to understand it in relation to its original context. However he seeks to preserve some role for the interpreter by drawing a distinction between meaning and significance. Whereas the meaning of a text remains constant, its significance will change in relation to the interests of its interpreters. On a somewhat similar grounds Phenomenological criticism stresses the perceiver's central role in determining meaning. It suggests that criticism should be concerned with neither the literary work as object nor the reader as subject but with the fact that the work has no existence other than as an object presented to consciousness. The text, therefore, allows the reader access to the author's consciousness making consequently the act of interpretation possible. Moreover, the text does not offer same face to every reader. The text is never fixed as the meanings shift from reader to reader and from one age to other.

Imbued with this theoretical background, I feel impelled to highlight what this proposed study does not address before defining its area of interest and expectations. The project undertaken does not deal with the historical

survey and development of either Utopian or Existential philosophy, and also it is not Existentialism versus Utopianism. This study, however, hopes to bring to surface Sartre's visions of life, individual and society/community, by maintaining that Sartre outlines a theory of future values in his novels. Through this theory of values, the individual will one day attain a state of existence and a mode of being ruled by freedom. This developed consciousness of the individual will then determine his relationship with life and other human beings in a societal framework. The study, obviously, refrain from any value judgment of this 'existentialist utopia'. It just discovers one very primary force working through all of Sartre's major works: the consciousness of the self. Sartre's works further man's struggle to achieve a sublimity of existence, which is an end in itself of almost all major philosophical systems.

The contents of the study include, first of all, a background to our theses statement by exploring a link between the two philosophical thoughts. Existentialism never existed in a vacuum of philosophical systems; and to assume that it just sprang from nowhere, and is dissociated in that sense from previous philosophies, is a distorted view. Thus we will relocate Existentialism movement in the grand perspective of human thought, of which Utopianism is one of the ancestors. We will explore the affinity between the two thoughts by taking into account existential notions of Self, Authenticity, Freedom, Facticity, Commitment and Responsibility, to name only a few, and their presence in

Utopian narratives of Plato (Republic) Thomas More (Utopia), and H.G. Wells
(Modem Utopia)

We hope to deduce a theory of future values that arise from Sartre's visions of life and the conditions he proposes and advocates for man. We hope to maintain our earlier argument that Sartre's version of life and his ethical and moral approach are essentially not nihilistic as he is obviously concerned with a being-in-the-world and what that being must do in order to attain a sublime self.

From this onward, we will indulge in a thematic analysis of the above mentioned existentialist ideas and theory of future values as expounded in Sartre's philosophy and elaborated in his fictive worlds. The focus of the study is Nausea and Sartre's trilogy, namely The Roads to Freedom In Age of Reason, The Reprieve and Iron in the soul, Sartre journeys from private to public life to incorporate his theory of values and visions of life. The trilogy contains the ideals and hopes of Sartre's 'existentialist utopia'.