

RESEARCH ARTICLES

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Jean-Paul Sartre's Existentialism: The Link

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Abstract

The supremacy of man in the idea of existentialism positions him as the core component of nature. As the being that proposed the idea of Artificial Intelligence (AI), man is at the center of everything. The ideology of Existentialism, which champions the liberty of man to actualize his own ideas and create his essence in the world, does not believe in God. One aspect of this essence is the manifestation of AI, a creation that has made man more resourceful in his society. This paper delves into the significance of man's creation of AI and its profound link with the philosophy of Existentialism. Drawing from a broader philosophical context, this study explores the influence of Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist works on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and how the latter has reflected on the nature of man. In conclusion, this paper will elaborate more on the significance of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the nature of man, emphasizing man's role in its creation.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Existentialism, Man, Jean-Paul Sartre, Freedom

Introduction

Jean-Paul Sartre's Philosophy of Existentialism

In the 20th century, many philosophers reacted to the world's situation by creating their own understanding of existence. These philosophers include Søren Kierkegaard, Karl Jaspers, Albert Camus, Simone de Beauvoir, Gabriel Marcel, Martin Heidegger and so on. However, in terms of the presentation of existentialist ideas, the concept created by Jean-Paul Sartre was unique because he experienced the issues at that time and had direct contact with its impacts. His experiences led him to extend the idea of existentialism. Such is recognized in the fact that during World War II, Sartre spent his time in the French army and also, he was captured as a prisoner of war in Germany. The ugly experiences led him to formulate his philosophy of Existentialism with its significant elements. His Existentialist Manifesto book titled *Being and Nothingness*, was written while he was still inside the prison. His ideas of Existentialism emerged from the book; these ideas include Freedom, Responsibility, Bad faith, Authenticity, Engagement and Anguish. According to Sartre, Existentialism's ideas were very important to adopt in the existence of man. This is because if individuals realized their absolute control of their being by themselves, bad experiences of war could have been avoided.

These ideas of Jean-Paul Sartre on Existentialism were employed in different literary works such as *Nausea*, *The Devil and the Good Lord*, *No Exit*, *The Flies*, *Dirty Hands*, *The Wall*, etc. According to Sartre, existence precedes essence, which implies that humans are born without a purpose, but their purpose is achieved by themselves through their authentic actions. The philosophical background of Existentialism establishes the theoretical backup of this work.

The Concept of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The origin of the concept of AI can be traced back to 1956, during an academic conference, when John McCarthy first coined the term "artificial intelligence" (McGuire, 2006). After the conference ended, other scientists followed suit with the innovative concept of artificial intelligence.

Artificial Intelligence (AI), also referred to as Machine intelligence, is a technological advancement that requires the assistance of man for its operations. According to Ziyad Saleh in his publication, *Artificial Intelligence Definitions, Ethics and Standards*, he stipulated that AI can tackle learning, perception, problem-solving, language-understanding and logical

reasoning (3). He further explained the traits of AI, such as the capability of predicting and adapting, the ability to make decisions on its own, and continuous learning.

However, AI is forward-looking, thereby allowing people to analyze dates and integrate information. Saleh also added that AI is capable of being perceptive. This drives home the concept of AI as a digital computer that performs different tasks that are associated with human beings. AI represents machines that have implemented intelligence from humans. One example of such AI machines includes large–language models (LLMs) such as ChatGPT, which is widely used by students and teachers and has an appropriate response to a user query (Hans Pedersen, 39). AI (Artificial Intelligence) has spread worldwide and is explored in every sector.

Existentialist movements, as presented by Baert (2015) in his publication titled *The Existentialist Moments: The Rise of Sartre as a Public Intellectual*, stipulated the socio-economic and political implications that emerged in the 20th-century aftermath of the 1st and the 2nd World Wars, the Nazi death camps, and the Hiroshima's bombing. These events prompted the emergence of the idea of Existentialism. Man decided to question his existence and find out the means to justify his existence without the mercy of his creator.

This evolved beyond measure as many critical minds sought and obtained the forum to extend thoughts using the philosophy of existentialism. Of course, existentialism became canonized. These ideas, as well, became captured in the literary world and in other aspects of life. The significant aspect of Existentialism is that it provides for the exercise of one's own choice, freedom to exercise one's rights and privileges, and freedom to utilize one's own ideas without the interception of or resort to a greater being.

This is based on its concept, which stipulates that existence precedes essence, which implies that essence is not given in advance. Rather, man is first thrown into his existence, and he is tasked with creating his own essence or personality through his authentic acts and choices in life. Jonathan Webber (2009) initiated a new interpretation of Sartrean existentialism by not only focusing on human existence; rather, he relates his idea of existentialism to its importance in the psychology of agency, ethics, character, and selfhood. This, thus, positions Existentialism to blend the thoughts of human existence and scientific innovations.

Sartre's book, *Existentialism is Humanism*, stipulates the meaning of humanism whereby humans act in pursuit of goals and values outside themselves in order to make their existence meaningful (J. Rohan,22). This, by implication, reveals the objective of creating AI by man in order to bring essence to his existence as a human being. However, to justify the connection of

AI (Artificial Intelligence) with the ideas in Existentialism will be mainly achieved based on the Existentialist ideas of Freedom, responsibility and bad faith because Freedom in the philosophy of Existentialism gave man the opportunity to create Intelligence that is artificially generated in order to achieve his essence in life. Bad faith assures man of his denial of his freedom, thereby shaping his own identity through technological means, while Responsibility makes him responsible for his actions in creating a machine to sustain him.

In another justification, AI represents the centre of technological advancement that contradicts the traditional method of doing things. However, amidst its scientific nature of being man-made, there exists a significant connection with the ideas of Existentialism, which is, man making his own life. In a concrete term, both concepts do not recognize the existence of a supreme being rather, they dwell solely on human-oriented capacity. Thus, this study examines significant relationships and interceptions of Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist ideas and AI. By examining AI's relationship with human Freedom, Responsibility, and Bad faith, the elucidation of AI's nature is interrogated, and deeper reflections on human existence is posited.

The Essenceful Intersection of Existentialism and AI

This section interprets the conceptual differences and similarities between the two notions of AI (Artificial Intelligence) and Existentialism. It explores the parallels between AI and Existentialism based on their backgrounds, natures, contents, and elements. This subject elucidates the significant affinity between Human existence and Machine Intelligence.

Based on the fact that the central idea of Existentialism is based on the view that man has the freedom to create his own destiny by his own choice (Sartre, 292); by implication, man defines his own standard of living by his own choices. Similarly, this is also attributed to the formation of machines by man in order to achieve a better standard of living. The machine is recognized to play the role of sustaining man for him to be purposeful on earth. This is recognized as a positive impact of Artificial Intelligence, which remains relevant in human existence. However, the central problem usually encountered by human beings is using Artificial Intelligence as a platform to create an existentialist threat to humanity, which could only be resolved by using existentialist elements such as Freedom, Responsibility and Bad faith. This central problem happens because Artificial Intelligence has become too powerful and too intelligent for humans to easily control (Hans Pedersen, 39). This central problem can be seen as a negative impact of Artificial Intelligence on humanity.

In another dimension, the concept of Artificial Intelligence contradicts the conceptual meaning of human existence by introducing non-human entities or machines with intelligent abilities. This contradiction limits the influence of man as the centre of all, as portrayed by Existentialist thought. The interception of Artificial Intelligence in Sartre's idea of Freedom and Responsibility is stipulated in this form; man is free to make his own choices and takes responsibility for his choices, so also, in connection with AI, this Freedom is constrained by technological determinism, thereby focusing on technological advancement rather than human development. This results in man not having full responsibility for his own destiny because machines seem to have replaced it. Also, talking about Existentialist Responsibility in terms of Artificial Intelligence, Mark Coeckelbergh Nick named it a narrative responsibility (2437) because of its connection to AI knowledge and because the innovation of Artificial Intelligence challenges human responsibility.

The Significant Connection Between AI and Bad Faith

In exploring the Existentialist ideas of Jean-Paul Sartre, we would definitely encounter the concept of Bad faith, which is recognized when a man is thrown into existence without any fixed objectives, and man experiences Bad faith in his attempt to get rid of himself from discomfort (Hans Pedersen, 43). This action of denial makes a man act as being-in-itself (43). However, from the angle of another philosopher, Simeon de Beauvoir, argues that such denial of our existence is based on bad faith, which makes man a serious man (*l'homme serieux*) because as the human being is thrown into existence without any objective, the human being must pursue his objective seriously. From the explanation of Bad faith according to Sartre and Beauvoir, we could denote the connection between Artificial Intelligence and Existentialism. This is justifiable in the sense that the model of AI (Artificial Intelligence) is produced to be a serious and objective machine, and it takes its tasks seriously and brings out the optimum results needed.

Conclusion

The emergence of Existentialism and that of the concept of Artificial Intelligence is seen as a problem solver in a critical time. The introduction of Existentialist thought helped man to realize the significance of human existence while Artificial Intelligence helps man to solve his

everyday problems. Artificial Intelligence is a machine created by man, and this still showcases the evidence of Existentialism in man whereby man is in charge of all, and he is in the centre of all, even the machine-oriented sphere. The interrogation of how Artificial intelligence connects with Existentialist themes of Freedom, Responsibility, Bad faith, and the nature of human existence has widened the horizon of understanding the different ideas that govern the understanding of human existence.

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