

# Significance Of The Concept “Human Existence” In Existentialism In Forming A Set Of Values For Youngsters In Vietnam Nowadays

Nguyen Thi Nhu Hue, PhD

Academy of Journalism and Communication, Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics,  
Vietnam

Email: nhuhue1310@gmail.com

**Abstract:** Although there are some limitations, overestimating personal values and trivializing social values, in the concept of “human existence” in existentialism, it certainly makes each human think of his status and natural values that we, intentionally or unintentionally, have lost or forgotten, so that we would be creative and have our own special thinking. On that basis, the paper draws significance of forming a set of values for youngsters in Vietnam currently. That is *orienting on building life purposes, training optimistic, activeness, creativity, and motivations for each person; Orienting on combining traditional values and creative values; Orienting on building the balance personal values and social values; Orienting on building love towards work.*

**Keywords:** human existence, existentialism, orienting a set of values for youngsters in Vietnam

## 1. Introduction

Existentialism is a major ideological movement of modern Western philosophy. When expressing their ideas, the existentialists normally focus on art models and literature via novels, short stories, plays, and poems with simple writing style to gain readers' love. Existentialism discusses issues like freedom and responsibilities, existence prior to nature, human existence shown in various areas like philosophy, ethics, literature, arts, and so on. Human existence is considered the fundamental value that shows basic spirit of existentialism when arguing about humans and their life values.

Existentialists also pay great attention on values and meaning of human life. Considering human to be the core and center of philosophy, existentialists think that we cannot approach and achieve it simply by rationalism and means of ratio. Existentialism, right from the beginning, human is nothing. Our nature does not appear first and it is not governed

or bounded by anything but freely created by each individual. Human is free to choose to be a cowed or a hero, to be strong and happy or be in vain, to be happy or lonely. No any other individual can create one's distinct personality or life. One should be himself, in a special and unique way, not a mix of anyone else in this life. One's personality shall not be badly deformed or controlled by anyone and it shall not be dissolved in this enormous world. No person, situation or external factor can change the meaning of one's life. One shall live up his life until death takes him away. Human must *be brave to jump into life* to confirm his value of existence, to identify his uniqueness in life. They care about how they live up as a human being not how to survive. With that perspective, human existence in existentialism is valuable in orienting a set of values for the young.

In the current globalization and international integration in Vietnam, the Western cultural norms are spread deeply, especially among the young. Therefore, it is essential and meaningful to study concepts of human existence in existentialism in a serious way with suitable scientific and objective attitude in orienting a set of values for the young in Vietnam nowadays.

## **2. Some fundamental definitions relevant to the research topic**

### *First: "Existence":*

Existence is a way of living, a unique and special attitude of a person with his finite personality. Existence is not natural, unchangeable, pre-set and pre-existing. It is associated with the ability to exist. It is the most original part and it is our mind.

### *Second: "Human existence"*

Human existence is not the existing and unchangeable existence that is pre-determined but it is chosen and designed by each person in his plan for his life. Human existence does not stand still but it lean forwards the future. That future depends on one's free choices of different possibilities for his act and the plans that he makes. Who I become and what my nature is in the future depends on my ability to design and implement the plans for my life. First, I must exist in the world before I can actually determine my nature. At first, a human is nothing without any nature, personality and he only exists before he becomes something. A person needs to design himself.

### *Third: "Value"*

The term value in this paper is the positive concept of an object, phenomenon, process, physical and spiritual relations with an individual, a society, a class, a community or the entire human kind in specific historical situations. The object, phenomena, processes, and

relations can be considered a value when they meet the good spiritual and physical needs of the human being. Therefore, value is the positive, beautiful, great things that can encourage people to get. We must keep in mind that value means the meaning of an object or phenomenon, not object or phenomenon itself. Meaning to say, object or phenomenon that is valuable to one person or community may not be of importance to another individual or community or it might be valuable in a situation but not in others.

Therefore, value is the positivity and things that are right and beautiful. There are various forms of value: spiritual, physical, long-term, short-term, and so on. Each nation, due to their different economic-social conditions, has their own sets of values.

### **3. Content of the concept “human existence” in existentialism**

*First: Human existence in existentialism is the existence, which precedes essence*

According to J.P.Sartre, humans are free to choose and design their own nature. Humans start living without any prior essence. They get themselves into different situations of life to create themselves and their essence. Human is a free existence and we have distinctly different choices in life. Only when human exist can he know about himself and only after experiencing can he know what he wants. Thus, a human is what he creates himself.

J.P.Sartre criticizes people who never have questions about anything. They give up on life and they defend themselves with social norms and existing ethics. He also criticizes people who make no move before the changed or new situations. Sartre does not accept a “stable” life with pre-set social norms, in a stubborn way. He thinks and finds a new set of ethics and warns the people who live for nothing but show off in front of other. Meaning to say, we live under the inquisition so often that we are scared of gossips from others. He mentions ‘hell is other people’ meaning a life where we have to follow other and lose ourselves is actually a hell. Sartre criticizes this kind of living because we exist and we must find the true way of living in spite of the virtual world, find our true freedom, and let people do it themselves.

Heidegger thinks that human existence is the most unique phenomenon that can question himself about his existence and design himself, and shape his essence in the future. Heidegger criticizes the discretion, putting one into the place of any other person. That is normalization, which means people do not have their own essence and they are shaped in a way that they do not even have their edge.

Existentialism is proud to awake people from the dream of corruption, reminding people that they are unique and have personality and that they are not an unknown number, a shadow of concept or an abstract category. People are special since we are born with different physical and spiritual conditions with different capacities. Thus, according to existential ethics, people need to utilize conditions and capacities to prove themselves or else we are just dependent. Those who live as others, think as others, and do as others are certainly not unique. A life like that, according to Heidegger, is a simple life, just as that of others; I am not myself, not a special person.

*Second: Human existence in existentialism is “authentic existence”*

Human existence with the acceptance of apposition by other people or chasing after the “public person” and losing oneself and personality is *inauthentic existence*. On the other hand, human existence with the search to prove oneself with a special and distinct personality is *authentic existence*. To achieve this, we must treat life as a gradual process to the death and that is the only event that, according to Heidegger, each and every one of us feels lonely.

*Inauthentic existence* named by Heidegger as the “They self”, is when people exist inauthentically, mixed with an unknown group without any color, capacity, responsibility, making it cold, dull, and unclear. The “They self” is not enthusiastic, specific or lively. People, living among public opinions, get shaped by public opinions, then lose their essence, uniqueness and ego, and get turned into the “they self”. People become a virtual shadow in life. People do not have their own essence, get shaped, and have no edge. Due to that kind of thought, there appear people who live against their will, live a fake and irresponsible life. They would downgrade their consciousness, integrity and twist the truth, and so on. The normalization view will make no one responsible for his or her act and behavior.

*Authentic existence* is a way of existence where people are aware of their history, limitation, and freedom. They live up to their loyalty, consciousness, code, ego and they put their future first. Authentic existence is the existence of the true life where we are responsible for what we do. We will never be satisfied when we say ‘that’s what people do’ or ‘the society needs that.’ I decide to do something because that is what I want as a purpose and most importantly, it is my choice. I make a choice and I know that I am free.

*Third, the death out of existentialism makes people turn back to their authentic existence.*

Existentialists discuss death but they do not see them as a bad thing; On the contrary, it is like a motivation so that people would make their life more meaningful and responsible. It is the thinking about death that starts the importance and urgency of human existence

because one's life is limited and people have to die anyway. Thanks to knowing it, people will stay awake to live as an existing human, to return to their true values of life, to go back to freedom and responsibility for human existence. 'I eat because I am afraid that I will not be able to eat. I love because I will not be able to love. I have passions because my passion will end. Death is the only and ultimate reason for people to live and desire to live'. [5; p.392]

Heidegger states that people can replace you in many roles but they cannot help you face your death. Since one's death is closely associated with himself, other cannot help them to face it or deny it. The possibility of death reminds people to design their lives. Thus, thinking of death is personalization, which motivates people on choosing their true values.

Existentialism makes each and every one of us live a better life, be dynamic, creative and overcome ourselves to become a special person. People cannot be machines, forced to do things under instructions of other people or programs, and then lose themselves. As long as I live in a normal way, I am buried by unknown and nonperson group of people. I do not dare to be myself. I am 'they self' without personality. I am not a special person but a unit, a number added to the crowded citizens of a city. Why is that? Because I never use my freedom of being a person. A free act is an act started within me. If I die before I decide and try to carry out the plans of my life, I know that my life is completely meaningless. It is meaningless because I have not used my freedom. I only live like an animal, not a human. Sartre recommends people on creating new values and not being satisfied with the old ones. According to him, firstly, we need to promote the values that enhance human freedom and, at the same time, do not erase the old values completely and study them in a responsibility for freedom. Sartre wrote: "We would like to build a kingdom of human with dignity and values that different from the physical kingdom" [3; p.51].

In short, human existence is one characterized existence of each person where he has special destiny, unlike that of any other. The number of people is equal to the number of personalities. Each person is a unique and special entity and he has specific, calm, colorful, and complicated internal world. Spiritual makes people lose their special selves and even lose themselves. It is when they are corrupted and no longer themselves.

#### **4. Significant of Perception of Human Existence in Existentialism on Orienting a Set of Values for the Young Vietnamese Nowadays**

*First: orienting on building life purposes, building positivity, activeness, and motivations of each person in specific situations*

“Human existence” in existentialism with the perspective that life is nothing but the meaning each person creates. Considering human to be a victim of faith, situation, subjective factors, gene, and so on is trying to fool ourselves, trying to turn ourselves to be cowards that lack encourage and motivation. It has certain significance in orienting the young to be determined, strong, independent, and able to overcome difficult situations. It also encourages the young to be studious and creative in scientific activities and actual activities of human. The young shall not depend on people or be lazy and scared of obstacles. As a human being and existing human in this life, he needs to live a life with a remark, whether it is small but unique and helps shape himself. One shall not give in a life that dull without having any essence or creativity or being ‘in between’, existing without making any values in life.

Besides, the concepts of existentialism consider people to be in the stage of “completing”. There is always possibility for a coward to be not coward and otherwise – a hero to be not hero anymore. Using this will help persuade the young that lost their ways to be good via new decisions in order to have a better future.

*Second: adopting traditional values and creating new values in the modern society*

One of the demerits of the existentialism is that it just encourages people to create new values but it does not praise the potentials of traditional values. Nowadays, it is sad that some youngsters in Vietnam, instead of being proud with what our ancestors have built up from generations to generations, turn their back on the past, history, and national tradition. The good traditional values contribute to the rational culture like loving people, union, appreciating community values, saving money are considered, by some people, to be outdated, not suitable with current situation and unnecessary for their life.

Reducing the demerits of existentialism, in the building their own values, the young need to remove the old and unsuitable norms to create new values, parallel with the good traditional values that were formed, tested, and confirmed through the history. We shall not deny them and we must maintain and develop them in new situations.

*Third: orienting on avoiding overestimating personal values, building the harmony between personal and social values*

With existentialism, personal values are praised but social values are not appropriately evaluated. In my opinion, personal values cannot be separated from social values. Both theory and reality show that caring and meeting the needs, interests of each person is extremely necessary and needs to be encouraged and that we need to take care of the

appropriate interests of individuals and treat them as one of the motivations for individuals to develop. Marx stated that ‘Society is a product of the interactions between peoples’ and ‘social history of human is always the history of each individual’ [4, p. 657 - 658]. However, if we optimize personal values too much, it is *a mistake* that we must pay *a great price*. If in a society, all people just ‘*care about themselves*’ then it is the signs of a rotten society as far as dignity is concerned. It is also a waken call for the existence and development of the society with nature of human society.

The young need to have appropriate comprehension on the relations between personal and social values. Then they need to adjust their behaviors in a way that create harmony with social values, instead of keeping the personal rules and do not care about others. All of our actions must focus on maintaining the balance between personal and social values, for personal values based on social values. That is the way for each person, community, and nation to develop sustainably.

*Forth: orienting labor values for the young when building life values*

Existentialism mostly focuses on the spiritual life and does not point out the function of labor in establishing life values while, as far as value is concerned, labor is the foundation of other values, even personal values. Thus, we need to praise common values and labor activities in the society. Marxism also states that work is the most important thing in human life values. Labor is our deep nature so work is also our life values. Labor is happiness of each person and human society. Labor helps our career become significant, puts goods things first, and let people create their set of values. Labor also helps people complete themselves via the development of social relations.

## 5. Conclusions

*First*, values of life in the perspective of human existence in existentialism are a meaningful, self-being, and ‘authentic’ life. No person or thing can create our nature, personality; one cannot be any other but himself. One shall not be ruled, forced, or shaped by any other person. In addition, no situation can affect and change my life values. The cowards always blame other people or situations. They find every means and words to get rid of an obvious fact of existentialism – the values of this life are created by each person via their choice and unlimited creativity. It is the person himself that chooses who to become, what to do, and how to create the values of his life. All people who live as others, think as others, and do as others are dependent and they lose their values in life.

*Second:* values in concepts of ‘human existence’ of existentialism help orient the young Vietnamese so that they have their code, motivation, capacity to overcome any difficult situations and change those situations to a better ones. The young Vietnamese need to determine their life values by combining the rational values and creating new values in this modern society. Although we need to encourage the activeness, positivity, creativity and enhance the personal freedom of ‘human existence’, we shall not perfect personal values so much that we forget social values. Moreover, labor is the best value since it creates physical values, a foundation for developing spiritual values. Therefore, the young Vietnamese shall not praise spiritual values so much that they forget about love and laboriousness in studying and working.

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