Three Quadrant Being: A New Analysis on Human Condition

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Abstract: The question of human existence and the meaning of life has been a topic of debate for generations. This paper presents the "Three Quadrant Model" as a new approach to understanding the human condition: the temporal, the absurd, and the meaningful states of being. These reflect three phases where humans may live within societal structures, recognize the inherent absurdity of existence, and create their own sense of meaning, respectively. While examining some investigated existential literature and historical philosophical perspectives, the research asserts that humans jump back and forth among these states rather than progressing linearly, as stated by Nietzsche's three metamorphoses. The three states are characterized by equality, ambiguity, universality, and subjectivity. Ultimately, the model suggests that the quest for life's meaning is subjective, and that no single state is inherently superior to others. The study calls for further exploration into the logical foundations and practical applications of this model.

Keywords: Human condition, absurdism, existentialism

1. Introduction

The condition of human existence has already been analyzed by generations of philosophers. Typical questions about this philosophical problem include: what is the meaning of life; is the meaning of life objective or subjective; what is freedom; are humans inherently free; is suffering necessary for human experience; etc. These questions arise when human beings find themselves in a state of general meaninglessness and boredom in the world: everyday they wake up, eat breakfast, go to school or work, eat lunch, continue working, and then go home at the end of the day. The cycle seems endless and purposeless. As a result, philosophers begin to investigate the purpose for which humans live, and how humans should live to have a meaningful life.

Nihilism, absurdism, existentialism, etc, are theories provided by previous philosophers to explain human existence [1]. This article, however, will show that human conditions cannot be straightforwardly described by any one of these theories. Only fictional figures such as Sisyphus and Zarathustra can be described by these radical existential theories [2, 3]. The real condition of human existence has much more complications. Therefore, this research proposes the following questions:

What is the condition of human existence?

How to categorize human's state of being?

How are these categorizations interrelated?

The article starts by arguing that human beings are born into a world that generally lacks meaning. And in this absurd state of existence, every human being gets to make their own decisions on how to live. The article then points out that there are generally three different ways of living - humans are living as three quadrant beings. The first quadrant is the temporal being; the second is the alienated or absurd being; and the third is the meaningful being. They correspond to living in structure, destruction, and construction, respectively. The article also points out the four characteristics of this model of human existence: equality, ambiguity, universality, and subjectivity.

2.   Literature Review

The problem of the meaning of life has been discussed ever since ancient Greece. However, in the very first several hundred years of philosophy, the great thinkers tended to seek meaning from the divine - from the religious certainty that is bestowed upon humans, or a metaphysical certainty that transcends material existence. In Christianity, for instance, the meaning of life is to worship and serve God; for Plato, the meaning of life is the pursuit of truth in his so-called realm of form [4, 5]. With the advancement of scientific knowledge, religion seems to be insufficient for human beings to account for their own existence; they need solid facts and reasoning. At the same time, the attention of philosophers gradually turns from the divine to being itself and rationality. During and after the Renaissance, morality, values, and reasons relied more on reason. Kant's morality is a typical example: values and moral judgments should come from pure reasons [6]. Modern philosophy, however, has developed a rather radical view of the meaning of existence. Nietzsche first proclaimed that God is dead, and humans should be the judges of their own values and morality. Camus argued that human life essentially lacked meaning - it was absurd and purposeless; to gain freedom and meaning for themselves, humans needed to embrace absurdity, just like the absurd hero Sisyphus. Jean-Paul Sartre proposed that the meaning of life lies within existence-humans should live in the present moment, make their own choices, and create meaning for themselves as though they were drawing on a blank sheet of paper [7].

3.   The Absurd Being

"Rising, tram, four hours in the office or factory, meal, tram, four hours of work, meal, sleep and Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, according to the same rhythm - this path is easily followed most of the time. But one day the 'why' arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement. 'Begins' - this is important.' Weariness comes at the end of the acts of a mechanical life, but at the same time it inaugurates the impulse of consciousness."[8] In the Myth of Sisyphus, Albert Camus depicted the human condition as in the above paragraph. Similar descriptions can be found in a great number of literature and philosophy treatise. In almost all existential literature, such as The Myth of Sisyphus, Nausea, and No Exit, the human condition is the same, even though the authors held utterly different opinions on the explanations and solutions of such condition - Camus and Sartre, in this case.

Whatever theories philosophers propose to explain such a condition of human existence, they cannot deny that this is how humans live. Humans are somehow trapped in time and space, having to wake up every morning, fulfill their duty at school or work, and then go to bed at night. On a large scale, humans cannot find values for this fixed agenda of life. What is the meaning of living, studying, working, and creating, if everything will disappear in the form of death? What is the meaning of existence if nonexistence is their destiny? Philosophers don't have an easy answer. When one day they suddenly notice such a cycle of life, humans cease their footsteps and stand on the corner of the street, watching people and cars moving back and forth. They understand that this is how everyone lives - absurdly and meaninglessly.

Therefore, the human condition describes the general state of being - a general lack of meaning in a repetitive and absurd life. It is universal, regardless of class, wealth, race, or any other structures that might influence the situation in life. The lack of meaning is true for both the workers who spend their life between factory machines and the billionaires who earn all the fortunes, fame, and social status.
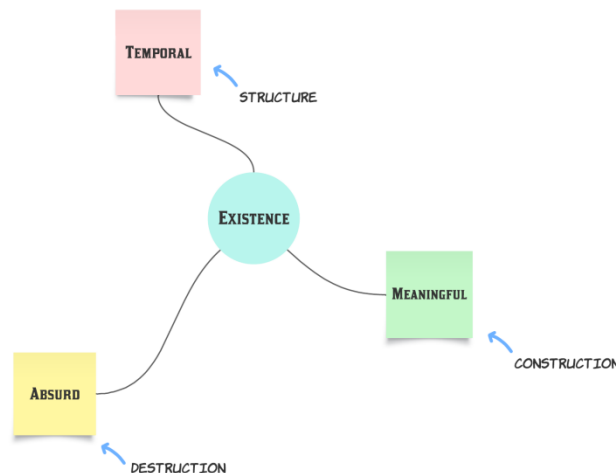
4. Three Quadrant Beings

Figure 1: Three-quadrant model of human condition

Figure 1 illustrates the three-quadrant model of the human condition. The first state is the temporal state. This is the state of being humans are born into. This is also the state in which an unconscious being would be - a state before waking up from the temporality of life. It follows the existing structures of the world. Obeyance, repetition, and boredom are the key characteristics.

The second state is the absurd state. This is the state that Sisyphus lives in, pushing the rock of life with the enlightenment that there is no meaning inside of daily actions and that everything is absurd. In this state of being, humans destroy the regular structures and meaning of existence, become observers and strangers, and are divorced from the world.

The third state is the meaningful state. This is the state in which humans create meaning out of their existence. Pursuing the truth, worshiping God, and fighting for the country are common values humans assign to themselves. Essentially, these meanings are absurd. Humans live, however, like a narrative in this state: meanings are constructed in ordinary everyday life.

5. Characteristics of the Three Quadrant Model and Human Conditions

Equality, ambiguity, universality, and subjectivity are the four characteristics of this model of human existence.

Equality means that all three states of being are equal. Ambiguity means there is no clear boundary between the three states of life. They are inseparable and interrelated. Universality means all human existence, in theory, will be in the three states of being at least once in humans' life. Subjectivity means that these existential conditions are subjective. Rather than being judged by an outsider, their condition in life should be entirely judged by their own mind. There might be a scientist who works tirelessly in pursuit of the physical truth. From an outsider's perspective, his life is meaningful because of the scientific truths he is creating or searching for. However, it is

highly likely that this person does not at all think his work is meaningful; he can be living in a temporary state.

This research will investigate the most important characteristic-equality. The model is not the first attempt in the history of philosophy to divide human conditions into three aspects. In Chinese Buddhism, there is a famous sentence that says: see mountains as mountains, not see mountains as mountains, and see mountains as mountains. This describes the three stages of humans' improved understanding of the world: in the very beginning, humans understand the world on a purely empirical level; then they begin to hold a skeptical view towards their previous knowledge of the material world; and lastly, they go back to the world again, but with certainty and almost a tranquility, so that they can create meaning from the mere existence of the most ordinary objects. Nietzsche also proposed the three metamorphosis: camel, lion, and child [9]. He claimed that humans are born camels, conforming to the values of society; and then they become lions who defy the existing values of the world. In the end, they go back to the starting point -: children, who are most pure and innocent, and able to construct meaning out of their everyday actions and existence.

In these descriptions of human conditions, the three aspects are more like three stages of development. They demand that humans begin at one of those stages, and as they grow wiser, they fall into the other two stages. This is, indeed, how figures like Zarathustra live. They start their life in a state of ignorance, grow to know that they need to deconstruct the structures and values they are born into, and in the end create their own values and meanings of life. This is also a typical structure of A Hero's Journey [10].

However, modern life is more like a tragedy than a hero's journey, where chaos fills the path of life for every being in this universe. Instead of growing from one stage to another, humans, in fact, live in a mixture of the three of them.

A lot of people indulge themselves in the temporal state of being, going to work on time without knowing what they are working on, following the social structures that are inherent to them, and attending parties or social interactions without asking the values of all these choices to live inside the world. Once in a while, nevertheless, they find themselves strangers to the world. When everybody else is purposelessly running ahead, they may feel like they are divorced from the world, knowing nothing about the meaning of life. They fall into a state of alienation and indifference towards all pain and happiness in the world-almost a state of nonexistence. But occasionally, they may also feel that their work has certain values: they may be fighting for their countries, developing technologies to improve life of ordinary people, or pursuing the truth of science. They may create meaning from their seemingly purposeless actions; they assign meaning to their existence.

When humans are young, it's true that they may not be able to have absurd reasoning-to feel the lack of meaning in this universe. As stated by Nietzsche, humans grow from a camel to a lion as their age and wisdom grow. However, when they become adults and conscious beings, they don't remain strangers. They jump back and forth between each of these states of life.

This research is now able to argue the equality between these three states of being. All conscious beings live in a mixture of these three conditions of life, being in one condition at this moment and then jumping into another at a different time. Which state, then, is better than the other? This question is equal to another question: which state has more meaning? Admittedly, the temporal state and the absurd state are meaningless. The only way humans can acquire meaning for themselves and their life is to live in the third state. However, this is not about the meaning of life. This is about the meaning of searching for the meaning of life. Is searching for the meaning of life a better way of living than not searching for the meaning of life? There is no answer. On the surface, humans can get more meaning for their life by searching for meanings, but this does not justify their attempts to search for meanings, because meaning itself is not justified. A meaningful life is not necessarily a good thing. Humans can argue that the meaning of life is merely a happy illusion that allows them

to justify their behavior at the present moment. Therefore, it is simply a matter of choice which state humans want to live in at present; there is no good or bad between the three states. They are completely equal.

6. Conclusion

Human beings are living a generally meaningless life. This research uses the "Three Quadrant Model" - temporal being, absurd being, and meaningful being - to explain existence. It states that human beings all live in one of, or several of, the three states. They may live in structures, deconstruct the existing structures and values, or construct values and meanings for themselves. The three states of being follow the characteristics of equality, ambiguity, universality, and subjectivity.

This research attempts to propose a new model of the human condition. To further develop the theory, researchers should find a logical explanation why the model should follow the four characteristics. The researchers may also investigate the application of such a model.

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