

From Kierkegaard's Angst to Religious Faith: A Case of Bobin's Life Pursuit

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Abstract: The detection of the ideas of philosophers in literary intellectuals' works and themes has always been of great interest to researchers. Many literary works directly or indirectly have revealed the philosophical ideas of the philosophers of the past. Indeed, their predictions which may have been staged or narrated in the following works are both inspirational and tentative. This paper has surveyed Kierkegaard's views of Angst to Religious Faith in Bobin's Work *the Eighth Day of the Week*, showing the ontological obsessions of postmodern man. It has revealed that Bobin's taking refuge in the bewilderment of life and death regarding his characters' ontological obsessions are justifiable at the shadow of Kierkegaard's views of existence which in the end this despair can lead to a kind of religious faith as a source of salvation and experiencing the life and getting along with death. The death-bordered-life from the viewpoint of postmodern man can be fathomed best at the shadow of this philosophical thinking what Bobin has put it in his prose delicately through his selected themes, settings, and characters.

Keywords: Anxiety, life pursuit, Kierkegaard, Bobin, Existence.

INTRODUCTION

Soren Kierkegaard was born on May 5, 1813 in Copenhagen. He was the youngest child of seven, born to parents of Jutlandish descent. He sometimes called himself a child of old age because his mother was 45 and his father 56 when he was born. Kierkegaard was influenced early in life by the devoutly religious teachings of his father which concentrated on Christ's suffering.

This Danish philosopher developed a new distinctive philosophy of life. His ideas, which were not appreciated until a century after their appearance, were literary, religious, and self-revealing rather than systematic in character. They stressed the importance of experiences that the intellectual mind judges as absurd, including the experiences of *angst* ("anxiety") and "fear and trembling." (The latter phrase is the title of one of his books.) Such experiences, in his view, lead first to despair and eventually to religious faith. Kierkegaard discussed this process in terms of the religious person who is commanded by God to sacrifice his own most cherished treasures, as in the example of Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac in the Old Testament. Although Abraham cannot understand this absurd request from God, he decides to obey his commitment to God. Through such terrible experiences, Kierkegaard claimed, we learn that humanity's relationship to God is absolute and all else relative. What are most significant in a person's life, Kierkegaard concluded, are the decisions made in such ethical crises. This way of

communication does not show us things, it reveals us a way of being. From this viewpoint all art sounds existential in this sense that it poses us the philosophy of our being, our place in this world and above all drives us to call into question ourselves and reconsider this idea how we are. Sheer entertainment takes us out of ourselves, whereas pure art returns us to ourselves, but altered, equipped with new orientations, questions, and horizons upon which to reflect.

Christian Bobin

Christian Bobin was born in 1951 in Le Creusot, a Burgundian town with a long industrial and history where he lived his whole life. His name resembles that of John Bunyan's Pilgrim progress.

He published short texts regularly from 1984 onwards and gradually attracted reviewers and public attention. Although two of his books have appeared in America, he has remained somehow unknown in other academic settings. This may be because he has not been well-off, or maybe he has ignored fame as all other things he has been offered in his life. This is what has made his idiosyncrasy of his view of life and existence. This is his tact in finding meaning for life as Matarasso the translator of his work has asserted that dates, events, any sense of a willed, let alone planned, progression through the years are as absent as Bobin has been able to make them, partly because he sets no value by these he could manage. The book selected to write this article about is *the Eighth day of the Week* which is indeed a

collection of works published from 1985 to 2012 and have been translated by Pauline Matarasso. As a translator of the English version of his work from that of Matarasso, I detected some strange but really novel themes like how can we feel and live our life in the deadly world, the alluring time killing values depriving us of our life, the ever presence of hovering death over our existence, the unpredictability of our tomorrow and our next breath maintenance. Bobin himself adapted from Matarasso's introduction indicates that 'I don't remember ever wanting this or that kind of life. From childhood on I have put my every effort into refusing whatever was proposed to me, pushed by something I couldn't put a name to and still can't'. The way Bobin has managed them all, the way he has always experienced death and fighting against it to live is really appealing. The research shares these atmosphere and the ways Bobin has tried to entice us into encompassing this reality from the view point of many incidents.

DISCUSSION

Kierkegaard's ideas came to have importance in the 20th century. The concepts of existence, dread, the absurd, and decision were influential in Germany, France, and English-speaking countries. The condition of humankind during an epoch with two world wars gave these ideas a new relevance; the philosophers who developed them founded the movement now known as *existentialism* which will be discussed and introduced in this paper.

Existentialism

Existentialism is a movement in twentieth-century philosophy and literature that centers on the individual and his or her relationship to the universe or God. It focused on the person, on individual existence, subjectivity, and choice. Two main existential doctrines assert that there is no fixed human essence structuring our lives and that our choices are never determined by anything except our free will. The origin dates to Plato's famous idea, "*Essence precedes existence.*" This idea, refined by Aristotle, for thousands of years under girded a number of different models for looking at life, and of course it still does. It states that existence doesn't just happen, that some essence (or meaning? or purpose? or creator?) must come first, and that out of this essence comes our existence. The Essential Man exists, in other words, before any individual person existed, and all people are derived from this perfect essence. Our existences therefore have meaning to the extent that we are able to understand or sense this larger essence. We use our existence in this Platonic view to understand the essence, to recognize it, to conform and maybe even submit to it. All of existence is made, in a sense, from the same blueprint (the essence).

What is the comfort, and what is the cruelty of this view? The comfort is that as humans made from the

same blueprint; so to speak, we can all understand and generally feel the same things. The cruelty of this Platonic view is that we will never be able to feel (or even think?) anything that each generation before us hasn't already felt. Even during those times when our feelings are so strong that we naturally assume no one else ever could have experienced or felt such fine or rare emotions, people still have. The fact that our existences all come from the same essence guarantees it. Existentialism reverses the emphases of Plato's observation. It theorizes that "*Existence precedes essence.*" There is no universal or divine blueprint or creating essence, this view maintains. Existence simply happens on its own, and we devote time and energy to looking at the nature of our existence in order to try to generate from it a useful meaning or essence. We can perhaps see the introspection and the focus on the self and on the processes of perception that are so much a part of modern literature in this movement. A byproduct of this idea is that because our existences are so different, the nature of the meaning or essence we find in existence can vary from person to person. One person can conclude that life or existence means one thing and another can conclude differently. Or the same person can decide different things at different times about the meaning of his existence. The slipperiness and difficulty of the nature of the existence makes this possible, maybe even likely. The comfort and the cruelty of this view can be seen in Jean-Paul Sartre's phrase "Man is condemned to be free." We have no predefined or archetypal pattern to guide us, and this certainly represents a freedom, but it is probably more freedom than most would desire. This desire, on the one hand, goes as far as that they treat religion, science, or other external factors as constraints and limits on the way of their individual freedom. On the other hand, it creates an opportunity for evading the responsibility for their own deeds and behavior by simply declaring that they are driven by factors beyond their control and that what they do cannot be. This is where exactly the crisis of human identity, his ambiguity of self-arises. This is because as Solomon [1], in his book, *From Hegel to Existentialism* has stated: "Existentialism is not a simply philosophy or philosophical revolt. Existentialist philosophy is the explicit conceptual manifestation of an existential attitude, namely a spirit of "the present age". From the viewpoint of many other intellectuals it is a philosophical realization of self-consciousness living in a "broken world" (*Marcel*), an "ambiguous world" (*de Beauvoir*), a "dislocated world" (*Merleau-Ponty*), a world into which we are "thrown" and "condemned" yet "abandoned" and "free" (*Heidegger and Sartre*), a world which appears to be indifferent or even "absurd" (*Camus*)" that have paved the way for the existential obsession revelation by later intellectuals.

This school of philosophy forms the building block of the theater of absurd which is the dominant

form of drama at 20th century. The existentialist label also has been applied to writers, philosophers, visual artists and filmmakers. The movement flourished in the mid-20th century Europe. Nineteenth-century precursors to this school of thought include Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Other 20th-century notables include Albert Camus, Jean Genet, Andre Gide, Simone de Beauvoir, Franz Kafka, and Beckett. As Wilcox has asserted "French existentialism colonized the popular use of the term absurd during the 1940s—with the existential meaning of the term dominating its usage in the literary landscape" [2]. According to Ross Murfin, "existential themes were essentially linguistically coupled with the word absurd until the emergence of the theater of the absurd in the mid-1950s. Eugene Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano* and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, both produced in 1954, helped to change the public perception of the term" [3].

And in this slippery use of this philosophical school of thought, the theatre of Absurd emerged whose proponents are introduced differently by different critics. What is clear is that the two major leaders in this new form of drama were Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter. At the core of diverse implications of existentialism, the one pertinent to one's sense of self and identity, one's being and existence as a great existential obsession has penetrated in these two great dramatists. The individual's freedom of life and action as an existentialism moral code has indeed thrown man into the mere bottom of uncertainty of his view of his self and identity.

The belief that someone or something else defined one's self was simply an example of rejection of accepting responsibility for what they were involved in, that is, making choices for themselves about themselves and their lives is what has formed the basis of in tumult status of characters in the major plays of the two playwright under discussion and the works of other writers of this school of thought. These attitudes can be clearly inferred in.

Eighth Day of the Week: Great Existentialism Effort

What is the eighth day of the week? Was it the day upon which God rested after creation of the world? Isn't it alluring that we want to immortalize our being by adding days to the week that do not exist in time and place? Isn't it a day in which we are left in vacuum of our being to think about life, death, and universe?

Many a people have given it a try for finding a way of immortalizing their life and existence. So many intellectuals have tried to make our life tangible and understandable. Chemists through their chemical studies, philosophers through their sophistication and

philosophizing, literary intellectuals through their maneuver over words, themes, literary techniques, and via any literary activity. Whenever they want to get to a higher level of understanding of life and the ever increasing and its neighboring death, he takes refuge in whatever way possible to reveal his innermost feelings of death hovering over his life and being, the unwanted coming into the world, and the imminent bitter succumb to death and mortality; the short pace of life, and the many threats of different types on the way of life from diseases, to war; from heart attack to an ominous unknown power system decision over our being. The sheer nature of the question of determinism to the hotly debated dilemma of choice over our decisions and actions may open up new challenges. A look at the life of many an intellectual of the same obsessions like Peter Porter makes it demanding and alluring. Peter Porter is an Australian who went to England in the early 1950s and whose first poems were published in the 1960s. His work is often sharply satirical, full of realistic details of material objects and the appearance of things and people, but also has a deeper and more universal quality since he is always conscious of the presence of death, a force that man cannot fight against: And if we shout At the gods, they send us the god of death who is immortal and who cannot read [4]. Bonin may have been afflicted by this thematic obsession and has tried to reveal through short stories collected in a volume following and serving an interestingly coherent theme, characterization, and life survey in the *Eighth Day of the Week*. His techniques, mode of thinking, and concepts deployed in the book contribute to meaning assignment to, and pursuit of life. What man would experience at first would be nothing but the anxiety that Kierkegaard had anticipated and reveals itself and self-estrangement for postmodern man for which Intellectuals like Bobin have developed such themes in his work. The name he has selected for his work is really on the line of getting out of this bewilderment. He cannot get out of this nonsense unless he finds a way of adding more days to the week or giving rise to the creation of a day which is not classified within its classified routines. To get out of anxiety and despair, he has got to surpass the period of challenging his every aspects of his being.

Self-Estrangement

In the works of many an intellectuals this estrangement is common. They may via the frame work of their intellectual activities have exercised ways of assigning meaning to the self and achieving salvation. For example, Samuel Beckett's works are on the line of "attempts to peel back the many facades of our postmodern consumer society to see if we might be able to recover some deeply buried self" [4].

One can see that "the anxiety, coming out of the recognition that the identity of self is problematic

and that negativity is all around us, can become a creative force as well as a subject for Beckett and Post-Beckettian writers including [...]" and many other postmodern intellectuals like Bobin. They create "characters with ontological and war-related fears" and makes the best use of these fears to "encourage us to face our fears" [5] and in reality to call us back to the real reality of our being, self, and identity.

One of the most basic philosophical questions asks whether there is any meaning in our existence at all. The human necessity of unifying explanation of world has always been satisfied by religion and creators of the philosophical systems who made the human life meaningful. The natural desire to get to know and understand the world in its most hidden spheres was fulfilled by religious dogmas about the existence of God, which guaranteed the meaningful contingency of human life. As introduced, Kierkegaard paved the way for and in a sense predicted the great challenge of postmodern man upon his ideas intellectuals would be promising in revealing the ontological obsessions and in helping man out in his pursuit for assigning meaning to their being and existence and making life better tangible. The great missing chain of search is God and his power and status in man's life. This too has already been an obsession but at postmodernism it has got worse. Friedrich Nietzsche's publication of his magnum opus *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, where of the revolutionary thesis that "God is dead" [6] has been on this life. From that time of Zarathustra, the old everyday certainties of life started to lose their certainty. World War I and World War II caused deep destruction and loss of human ultimate certainties and definitely brought about a world missing any unifying principle, a world senseless and disconnected with human life. If one realizes the absence of sense, and this is the expression of the spirit of epoch, in which the world of Bobin is death dominated, the world becomes irrational and the conflict between the world and the human being who begins to be estranged from it, the ontological crisis arises here. Literature has got to mirror this view of modern human being.

He has introduced the death of old god as well as the failure of science and materialism to offer a new god to the still living instinct of the modern man as the underlying cause behind this malady. Bobin's prose would confirm Doherty's assertion that: "the world's behavior is not mirrored on the stage, but the stage comments savagely on man's condition and his best desire to make a self-important out of meaningless existence to see himself as having played his best for a loss or a win" [7]. The hallmark of this attitude is in its sense that the certitudes and unshakable basic assumptions of former ages have been swept away, that they have been discredited as cheap and somehow childish illusions" [8]. Ever since, the first passionate

warnings of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche about a hundred years ago, a small minority in the field of art, literature, and philosophy have been accompanied by an increasing feeling of urgency about man's self-estrangement in the modern world. The idea of man's tragic self-estrangement has been expressed in the works of, for example, Dostoyevsky, Rilke, and Kafka, and those "writers of very varied orientations who have – against their protest – been thrown together under the common description of 'existentialists' [9]", including Heidegger, Jaspers, and Sartre. All that these have had in mind to do has been the arouse of man from his current collective existence and the removal of the tragic absurdity of his self-estrangement by enabling him to handle dread, agony, despair, and disappointment, and by stressing the significance of the question of how to face death and how to experience death dominated life, the great obsession which is running throughout all sections of the *Eighth Day of The Week*. Many intellectuals have tried to present a justification like lack of meaning in modern life and the vacuum by which man's religious instinct has been starved or cut off, but so far both philosophers and intellectuals have shown themselves acutely tried and wanted "psychic developments [be] allowed to contribute to the new orientation" [10]. On this line Hesse asserted that a number of people sense this ignorance and die the more easily because of it. This is in a sense because the world "is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name of man being the name of that being who, throughout the entire history of metaphysics of onto theology-in other words, throughout his entire history-has dreamed of full presence, the reassuring of foundation, the origin and the end of the play" [11]. To come to understanding of one's self, no doubt, is not an easy task. Self-definition and self-realization at the mercy of alterations of the time requires appropriate attention and modification. As an example, on the line of achieving real meaning of ontological obsession, Frost asserts that "all of our consciousness – our sense of meaning, our very sense of self – must be constructed from the material to which we have attended. The meaning we derive as we experience life, the consciousness that is a stream of this ongoing experience, and the self that we construct as a personal representation of consciousness are all dependent upon our habits of attention" [12]. Attention which cannot be the source of the consciousness upon which one can realize his own sense of self and finally upon that felt self-assign his own self an identity has been shattered. Bobin says that the man in the room next to my mother's died two weeks after his arrival in the home. Each time for me to see something of his elegance, his weariness and his soul, worn as thin as a used bar of soap that keeps slipping through the fingers. His room has disappeared from the door of his room, and the gleam of the newly white card sears like a mystery. Such

assertions all are poured out because of the inner mind view of death in his work.” Death agonies, long-drawn, are presented as entertainments [like today]. The chamber of suffering is open like the others and the audience is held there” (EDW, 2).

Alongside this death dominated existence, in pursuit of life, Mattarasso asserts that his life is “like a boisterous child”. At times of inner dereliction he is ‘sequestered like a child sent supper less to bed’. But happily –for some fasts are necessary –no one comes to revoke the punishment, and when the child emerges in the morning, he washes the darkness from his face and in rainwater and finds life waiting for him out of doors”. (V) With this regard, “Camus believed that, despite the limitations in perspective and the absurdity of life, humans can make decisions that lead to less suffering. This is not the eradication of evil...it is instead the work of human to reduced suffering when they can, to act with the acceptance that all cannot be healed, resolved, or explained on this earth” [13]. This is because as Genovese asserts “hope becomes useless because it is concerned with the future rather than the present, and the future is nonexistent. In fact, it is only through Absurdism that one may fulfill her/his greatest potential for optimism, passion, and insight” (3).

Philosophical thinking is prevalent throughout his book. He has directly or indirectly been afflicted by the same mode of thinking and behavior. To one he is most accompanied is Kierkegaard who is generally regarded as the founder of modern Existentialism. Although rationalism has been in common practice in the past and its proponents even exist today, yet, it was Kierkegaard who established the concepts that influenced later intellectual among whom we can refer to Bobin who can best be understood at the shadow of the philosophical findings. Like Camus [14] he confirms that the only comprehension a man has is one of a difference. In this way, man retracts himself because he feels threatened by the disconnection of the world, provoking conflicts. Bobin spends most of the days alone, with his father at the last resort in which he witnesses the death of many old men and women. He experiences life with the determined and hovering death as the ultimate destiny of man; therefore, the idea of the world and the imminent journey obsesses him and tries to assign meaning to the seconds of his life. He reacted against the absolute idealism of traditional philosophers Kant and Hegel who considered philosophy as a science. In his pursuit of meaning of life and he comes to the idea that as Kierkegaard has asserted knowledge is an unattainable ideal. On this, Bobin agrees with him and finds fault with these philosophies for their abstract hypotheses and their pretensions to answer existential obsessions without even posing the primary questions about the meaning of life and identity. Kierkegaard paves the way for him in this quest that seeking

‘absolute knowledge’, is only a limited human being and cannot go beyond it. Like Hegel in following rational understanding of humanity and the history of humanity, he fails to capture a good vision of life and its accompanying death. Just like Kierkegaard, on the other contrary, asserted the ambiguity and absurdity of the human situation, and believed that the individual’s response to this situation must be to live a totally committed life, and this commitment could only be understood by the individual who has made it. He gradually comes up with this reality that “the individual must always be prepared to reject the norms of society for the sake of the higher authority of a personally valid way of life. Kierkegaard ultimately advocated a “leap of faith” into a Christian way of life which was the only commitment that could save the individual from despair [15]”. This view has been inspirational in Bobin’s work and has been the driving force behind life search perseverance

More Searches for Life and Salvation

Bobin does not get disappointed in his search for life. Pual Keegen, hence forth, indicates that the world will freely offer itself to you to be unmasked, it has no choice, it will roll in ecstasy at your feet. On the way of finding the meaning of life he says: ‘we need no guard, not only against the world, but against our preoccupation with ourselves, another door by which the world might creep back in like a prowler into a sleeping house.’ Hence, we must get away from the crowd out there, but also from the crowd inside ourselves. We are the obstacle that stands between us and an unobstructed view (Keegen, Introduction).

Bobin is afflicted with the idea of Camus [14] that the feeling of absurdity is because of the consciousness man acquires of his condition as human being which can best be synonymous as the *agst, anxiety or despair* of Kierkegaard. The kind of interpretation and mode of living this man follows brings the desired meaning to his life and his being. However, this may not goes on as wished due to the fact that “man lives according to the rules and traditions of the place he lives in” [16] if he wants to violate the rules and live his own interpreted life he will end up as the a mere special outcast. This may be a big factor behind the inaccessibility of the real meaning and experience of life as perceived. Bobin well has understood this reality and sets everything that drives him to the corner from the fame to financial gain. He chooses his own amount from everything around him. He cannot fathom life, “where we are-in the eternal moment- there are no words, since everything is present. Where we are not-in the passing hour- only words are left, balled together like birds’ down forgotten by the wind in rutted tracks “(P.17). The types of characters in *the Eighth Day of the Week* all share this outlook of the world and life. *The*

Tight Walder, Mozart, and all other segments of his novel have such a trend in characterization.

Man has to find a way for his best leading of his life because in this absurd world as Genovese has indicated “God is no longer available to provide comfort. Human must interpret their sensory experiences, make decisions, live with both the consequences and limiting nature of those decisions, and accept the impossibility of understanding non-human ways of being (3).

As his final solution of uncovering the reality of being and handling death, he turns to solitude as a way of seeing rather than a pious removing. And what it sees is far from bad news. He has time to pay attention to what he hears rather than what he says. To him “this is a tale with nothing to say” (p.4). “On goes the tale, the tale of this morning with nothing to tell, It doesn’t end until-in the quiet withdrawal of evening- I wish to write about it: then the words grow faint and what they name is seen as from a great distance, like a fire catching in the face of sleep” (EDW,IV). He tries to find life in silence. Kierkegaard inspirations are projected based on Joyce stream of consciousness an old woman admits that she is “so lonely that she hears “the noise of the light bulb” when eating in her kitchen. On the way of getting closer to the real meaning of ourselves and lives, Keegan reveals “his writing persuades us that here we have one manifold definition of being alive-as a position without defenses. “All we can do is welcome it ...It borrows our body for a while and will outlive it. ‘Again, we think of the ancient Greeks- and I think again of Winicott, the practitioner of a modern and wholly secular practice of the self-which may seem a farfetched connection, but who originally was comparably hard-won and patient, who wrote that ‘ it is a constant struggle to get to the starting point, and to stay there.’ It can be concluded that “people have to find their own meanings and apply them to their values; judging and learning, to make life a place worth living” [17].

CONCLUSION

Kierkegaard's philosophical ideas have been crystalized in the works of so many other intellectuals. His views of ontological obsessions and his solution for paving the way for getting along with those problems have been inspirational for the future thinkers and intellectuals. Bobin in his major prose work the Eighth Day of the Week has delicately through his idiosyncratic novel genre has reflected the postmodern ontological themes and the ideas of Kierkegaard on the way of illuminating man come up with an acceptable faith and justification for his death-bordered-life. Bobin through the deployment of novel features including the settings of special type like care home for Elderly Alzheimer’s patients including his own father. A far off

village in which life has been wiped out. God has already evacuated there. Another setting is the retirement home of his mother. For sure, he willingly due to his loneliness and the absence of any acquaintance except the memory of a woman he already loved but is dead now and the introduction of a little girl in far parts of the short stories cannot be detected will end up here too. This imminent presence and tangible condition of his own life in the future now envisaged in his mother and father has mentally and existentially violated and has enticed him into finding a way of experiencing life and enjoying rather than waiting for the bitter death striking many old man and women he witnesses every day. This goes to a climax when he feels the smell of the dead in the elevator, in the discolored mirror of the rooms, and the misery of the blossoms of the trees to flirt with the young not the waiting-for-death elderly he wholeheartedly perceives. The Angst (Anxiety) views of Kierkegaard and his final refuge to Religious Faith as the final inspirational salvation has been well implemented in his novel the Eighth Day of the Week. He has given rise to the creation of a work of narrative philosophy revealing and curing the postmodern ontological problems and dilemmas.

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