

**THE EXISTENTIALISM STUDY IN *BETWEEN A ROCK AND
A HARD PLACE* NOVEL BY ARON RALSTON**

THESIS



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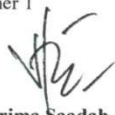
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Dealing with self-discovery is certainly related to the human existence. The existing of human being is used as a starting point of existentialism. The existence of human is called authentic if someone can freely choose who and what will be. Besides, people are forming themselves by their own actions and ways. They do not want to be influenced by others to form themselves, even by nature and society. In this real-life, it is free for human beings to take part in everything they want as long as they are responsible. Humans can also show their reasons for what he has done (Dagun, 1990, p.18)

Existentialism is a human philosophy that can be compared to a living person-an individual who has vitality, rational power, and freedom of choice, prepares for integrity, sustains despair, and lives in despair and perishes (Amin, 1992, p. 40).

The earliest existentialist named Soren Kierkegaard starts from the idea of man as an individual or a persona that exists and concrete. He saw that the most fundamental thing for man is the state of his or her existence. According to Kierkegaard, existence can only be applied to humans as a concrete individual, because of only concrete individuals who have coexisting, which truly exist and are present in a true reality (Mackay, 1994).

Kierkegaard states that there are no rigid moral standards that restrict themselves into beings (Solomon, 2002). Belief is an important base to choose because only based on the belief that an individual has the opportunity to become a true self. Soren Kierkegaard argues that there are three stages to the ways of human beings: aesthetics, ethics, and religion (Solomon, 2002).

In simple terms, existentialism is a philosophy of finding oneself or self-discovery and the meaning of life through freedom, choice, and personal responsibilities (www.allaboutphilosophy.org/existentialism). This means existentialism is a philosophy that facilitates us through the freedom, choice, and personal responsibilities to find ourselves and the sense of life.

As a philosophy, existentialism is certainly cannot be separated from literature. Indeed, philosophy and literature are different from each other. The difference appears as philosophic studies of the human being and emphasizes the living human, while literature illustrates the characters of his author's work. However, these two studies are intimately connected, since literature is often the expression of ideas of philosophy. Thus in literature and philosophy, there is the same characteristic, which is freedom of thought (Wellek & Warren, 1956)

Literature is an instrument for putting on someone's idea. According to Wellek and Warren (1993), the relationship between literature and ideas can be understood in very different ways. Commonly, literature is considered to be a form of philosophy, as "ideas" wrapped in form; and it is analyzed in order to produce "leading ideas". It means literature is a form of philosophy, and the idea of someone about philosophy can be found through the analysis of literature.

Literature is a creative activity, a work of art. Literature is closely related to human life because what is presented in the literature is a picture of everyday life. Authors view events going on around it and pour it into a literary work to be enjoyed by readers. Literary works grow following his era until the modern era. Some modern authors' mostly topic was their experiences like alienation, loss,

despair, psychological problems, the search for identity, and the social systems, which sometimes cannot overcome personal satisfaction. These conditions encourage people to seek happiness by seeking freedom of self. Suyitno (cited in Wirahadi, 2008, p.26)

There are three genres of literature: epic, drama, and poetry. Because the new prose form was generally replaced by the eighteenth-century novel, in recent classifications, the terms fiction, drama, and poetry are preferred as the terms of the three main literary genres (Klarer, 2005). Fiction has two types: fiction and non-fiction. Fiction is a common term for imaginative work, mostly in prose. It is generally written with the imagination of the author. The novel, the short story, and the related genres are now widely used as fiction (Cuddon, 1994). The form of novel and documentary fiction can be non-fiction based on real-life events and people who draw largely on documentary evidence such as press articles, official papers, personal letters, and interviews. The conversations and thoughts of the protagonists are the invention of the author and are elements of the stories (Cuddon, 1999).

Novel is one of the forms of fiction. Long prose fiction is a literary work novel that shows characters and a set of events and a structured context (Sudjiman, 1990). Generally, fiction novel comes from the imagination of the author. The author's imagination may include human desire, human existence, and human life, portrayed by the use of a certain character within the storyline of the novel. The presence of human-life literary works is a part of the existential novel.

While non-fiction novels usually present content that is happened in life, whether it is experienced by the author or someone else

In general, there is no such thing better when person comes to reading fiction or non-fiction. It is a matter of taste for most people. The researcher gravitates to non-fiction because it can give many benefits to human's understanding about himself. One of best seller novel non-fiction genre is *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* by Aron Ralston. This novel tells about adventure and carries out the theme of human existence. The idiom that is adapted to the title represents the novel's content. The idiom between a rock and a hard place means being faced with a dilemma that only affords a choice between two unpleasant alternatives.

Hence, the study aims to portray self-discovery journey that happens in Aron Ralston's life as a main character in the novel *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*. Aron Ralston is an American outdoorsman, mechanical engineer, and motivational speaker. The novel tells about the author's own experience which is Aron's life journey in his desire for outdoor activities, until he had an accident at Blue John Canyon in southeastern Utah on April 26, 2003. Aron started his journey when he was 28 years old to look for self-discovery and resolution for his boredom. This novel blends Aron's life story before and during the trip, describing the challenge of physical and spiritual realization while on the road.

The journey of Aron's life regarding self-discovery is very interesting to discuss through the phenomena that occurs in the whole story. It is in line with the concept echoed by Soren Kierkegaard. Therefore, the researcher applies the

compared to a living person - the individual that has vitality, reasoning power and freedom of choice, prepares for wholeness, endures despair, and lives in anxiety and perish (Amin,1992). It means existentialism is a human philosophy which can be compared to a living person, an individual who has strength, rational power and personal freedom, prepares for integrity, continues to live despite being in despair, and lives in sadness and face death.

Besides, there is also a definition of existentialism from Suyitno (1986). He says that Existentialism is a genre of philosophy thought that appears as a response to modern life. In his notion, modern life brings us about nothingness, despair, and feeling of loathing. The only solution to solve this problem is freedom based on the individual. It can be said that existentialism is philosophy thought as opposed to modern life, which means each individual in modern life will experience nothingness, despair, and feeling of loathing. Choosing to be freedom is the only way that can solve the problem of modern life.

Meanwhile, existentialism can also be translated as man's effort; a man tries to build an identity of his own and determine his place in his society. Existentialism is the effort of the man to relate himself to his own life of others around him (Stafford, 1996). It supports defining what existentialism is. The word existentialism can be interpreted as man's effort to create his identity in his own way without the determination of society.

2.1.1 Human Existence

According to Soren Kierkegaard, a human is an existence. Only human being does exist. He is different from other God's creatures like animals or

plants. To exist means self-known, engagement, practice self-ideology, and fill in freedom. Human existence is based on factual, individual, personal, and subjective. These human symptoms are going to be specifics, specials, and humanism. These approaches must be subjective, from subject to subject, and from person to person (Panjaitan, 1996).

The explanation above clearly defines humans is existence if that human can produce an authentic self through the freedom of choice and what he will be. Human freedom and existentialism are closely related. Kierkegaard emphasizes freedom as the most important part of a human being. Therefore, the concept of existentialism means knowing his or her self, involvement, and choosing freedom.

The most notable philosophers of existentialism in nineteenth century are Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche. Kierkegaard is called the father of existentialism as a pioneering existentialist (Kirmmse, 1996).

Kierkegaard wants his literary philosophy to address readers intimately, existentially, to call out from them their sense of the meanings and directions of their life. Persons have complex social identities, but that is not the end of the matter (Ziolkowski, 2018). It means that as a literary philosopher, Kierkegaard wants his philosophy regarding existentialism can be used as people a way to know how life has a sense of meaning and direction. Because basically, we as a social creature must have complex problems, but actually, life is not about it. Because there is something more complex to live, and it is not seen from our social identity in society.

humans. There is dissimilarity between the movements of the ethical to the religious. The leap of faith ushers one into the presence of a subject and not into the presence of a God. God can be defined as philosophically or rationally as the Absolute and the Knowledgeable Truth, which is objective. However, Kierkegaard claims that to be religious conscious, the individual must seek God not in an objective way, bringing God to light objectively but experiencing God as subject and, therefore, exists only for subjectivity and inwardness. At the ethical stage, an individual could offer life for moral law as in the case of Socrates, but in the religious stage, it is about human's relation to God; therefore, human rationality or knowledge fails to define this relationship (Stumpf, 1988). From that explanation, it can be said that to be religious-conscious, a person at this stage must seek God through enlightenment in his life because the religious stage is a stage when a person is already acting and making commitments.

For Kierkegaard, only an embrace of religious faith can avert false attempts to hide from anxiety or from the task of being a self. True passion, commitment, and risk can be found only in a leap of faith that embraces the aspects of your existence that you cannot in any way rationally understand. In short, truly religious life is the attempt to embrace the *absurd* (a central existentialist notion) that lies at the core of your existence. This embrace will, in the end, acknowledge that your existence is dependent upon something greater than yourself. In Kierkegaard's view, that is God! (Gale & Panza, 2008). This means only an understanding of religious faith can help avoiding false, which tries to cover anxieties.

interpreted by the reader as being endowed with particular moral, intellectual, and emotional qualities by inferences from what the person's say and their distinctive ways of saying it, the dialogue and form what they do the action (Abrams, 1999, p.32). Characters play an important role in a story, as they help the reader to participate vicariously in the experience of the story by sharing the feeling or the activities of the characters in the story imaginatively (Rohrberger & Woods, 1971, p.19). It means that characters are being a significant part of the life of literature because each character shows how interesting the story is.

Characters as the person that are presented in the literary work, whereby reviews of their appearance is interpreted by the reader as a character with desires, motivations, and emotional qualities are expressed through in their words and action in the story. Therefore, a character can be called as a fictitious human being who is created by the author to present the story or plot through words. Hence, all the characters in literary works are fictitious. Although they are not real in fiction work, sometimes the author created them as representative of personal character from the real word (Holmon cited in Aisyah 2018, p.28).

Besides flat and round character, there are major, and minor characters build inside the story (DiYanni, 2001, p.38). The major character plays the biggest role inside the story. The major character is the most dominant told in the story and emerges from the beginning to the end of the story. While minor character is a part as supporting role in the story. A major character usually has a round character means that his character can be changed as the story progresses while the minor character has a flat character means that his character stills the

2.3 Review of the Previous Study

Umar Wirahadi, Faculty of Humanities and Culture, State Islamic University of Malang, in his thesis entitled *The Existentialism Studies on Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe's Freedom Life*, discussed how the character defends his existence and the relationships between existence and freedom of choice. The researcher used existentialism theory to find out the existentialist aspects of the novel and focused on the major character of the story. The result of this study concludes that the way Robinson Crusoe defends his existence is related much to the existentialism aspect. All of his effort to realize his own life based on his own choice freely, it can be seen as a complete existence. Moreover, in his struggle to survive his life, he also finds himself in alienation or estrangement, anxiety, nothingness feeling, and getting his freedom, all of these also means to get his own existence. The researcher found a similar idea in the relationship between existence and freedom of choice. Both of them influenced each other; on the other hand, they include Existentialism themes. In short, using Existentialism theory to analyze *Robinson Crusoe* is very comfortable.

There is also Yohana Retno, Faculty of the Letters Sanata Dharma University of Yogyakarta, in her study entitled *The ideas of Existentialism as Revealed through the Main Character in Albert Camus' the Stranger*. This study discusses how the main character in the novel is characterized and how existentialism is revealed in the novel. This study uses the existentialism theory by Albert Camus. The result of this study found that the main character's characterization has a significant role in revealing the ideas of existentialism. The

way the main character, Meursault, sees the life and the events in his surrounding becomes the evidence that Camus employs the main character as his means to deliver his ideas on existentialism. By paying great attention to Meursault's characteristics, the writer finds some principles of existentialism portrayed in Meursault's characteristics. In this sense, existentialism is described as an existence that requires total freedom. Total freedom can be gained when people live entirely apart from God. Though a man should have absolute freedom, a total responsibility is required. Love should be avoided since it is a forgetfulness of the self. Furthermore, everything people do in their life will be ended by death. Death is a natural and normal thing to happen as a cycle of life. However, suicide is not the best solution to end a life, but the struggle is the thing that people should do to face the absurd world. This belief leads people to behave absurdly. In other words, the absurdity becomes the essential characteristic of existentialism.

The similarities of two previous studies with this study are certainly in the theory that is existentialism theory. The two previous studies focus on analyzing the freedom of the main character. Thus, to make dissimilarities between both previous studies, the researcher will use Kierkegaard theory and new criticism as the approach in this study.

gratitude for my life are of times with my family and friends. I am beginning to understand the priceless nature of their company, and it depresses me to realize that wasn't always the focus of our time together (135).

The evidence above correctly proves that Aron is independent person. It can be known by Aron's expression that during this time he was spending too much time on himself by going alone for hiking, ignoring the presence of his family and friends. The word "self-centered" represents that he is indicated as an independent person.

Another Aron's characterization in the novel describes that Aron is passionate. A passionate person means a person who is having very strong feelings or emotions. Aron's passion can be seen from his interest in outdoor activities.

I wanted to taste that joy, to experience that passion for adventure, to cast away the security of my job and let my spirit roam. This meant I needed to get educated on outdoor living; I needed to gain experience before tackling major expeditions; and I needed to be prepared and mitigate risks. Even more directly, I needed to get a truck and then leave my job. But I had a ways to go before I would be ready to do that (64).

The evidence above shows that Aron wants to pursue his passion in the field of outdoor activities. The strongly feeling to get pleasure by experiencing adventures reflects that Aron is a passionate person. He also could escape from the boredom of his work. Aron plans to get an outdoor living education because he thought that it is important to gain experience before beginning his expeditions; Besides, outdoor living education is needed to reduce the risk. He also needs to get a truck before he leaves his job.

when he visits Blue John Canyon. All of his adventures turned out to be a way for Aron to find the meaning of his life.

The ethical stage in Aron's life is depicted when he faces the difficulties in Canyonlands, especially Blue John Canyon. The ethical stage in Aron's life can be seen when he is aware and know of his mistakes. It means that he is aware that the most important in life is not an achievement but a whole process to get the achievement itself. So now Aron understands everyone he loves will respect him not for who he is, but as he treats others.

The religious stage is described when Aron has known and edified a life concept. He felt blessed by God for his chance to continue his life. The spiritual journey in Blue John Canyon has transformed Aron into a better outdoorsman. It made him connected with God that he was the witness that there was greater energy than him. He also accepted his new physical condition without feeling regret at all in which it indicated that Aron was committed to living as an outdoorsman and responsible for himself at any risk for his actions. From here we can know self-discovery of Aron's life.

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