

"Delving into 'Nausea': Unraveling Sartre's Existential Complexities and Impact"

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Abstract:

This research article undertakes a comprehensive and critical examination of "Nausea," a foundational work in existentialist literature by Jean-Paul Sartre. Published in 1938, "Nausea" not only heralded a new era in philosophical fiction but also established itself as a pivotal exploration of existential themes such as absurdity, freedom, and the essence of human existence. The primary objective of this research is to delve into the intricate layers of Sartre's novel, elucidating its philosophical underpinnings and literary significance. By contextualizing "Nausea" within the broader existentialist framework, the article highlights its substantial contributions to both the literary and philosophical domains. The focal point of

The analysis is the novel's protagonist, Antoine Roquentin, whose experiences of profound alienation and existential disorientation are meticulously examined. These experiences, as the article argues, are not only central to understanding Roquentin's character but also pivotal in comprehending the novel's existential revelations. The narrative style, marked by its introspective and sometimes unsettling monologues, is critically assessed for its effectiveness in communicating the novel's core existentialist themes. The research delves into how "Nausea" addresses key existential concepts like freedom and responsibility, integral to Sartre's philosophical doctrine, and how these ideas are manifest in Roquentin's experiences and reflections. The article also provides a critical examination of the novel's nuanced depiction of the absurdity of human existence, drawing parallels and contrasts with Sartre's later philosophical writings. The conclusion of the article reflects on the enduring legacy of "Nausea," emphasizing its continuing relevance in existentialist thought and its impact on modern philosophical and literary discussions. This article aims to not only dissect "Nausea" as a literary piece but also to underscore its enduring significance in shaping existential philosophy.

Keywords: Existentialism, the essence of human existence, existential disorientation,

Alienation, Absurdity.

Introduction

Jean-Paul Sartre, in his own words, challenges the very fabric of traditional narrative through "Nausea," stating, "I was in the park just now. The roots of the chestnut trees are sunk in

the ground just under my bench. I couldn't remember it was a root anymore" (Sartre, "Nausea"). This line encapsulates the essence of existential thought that pervades the novel, setting the tone for a narrative that is as much a philosophical exploration as it is a work of fiction.

"Nausea" is not a novel in the conventional sense; it is an introspective journey into the mind of Antoine Roquentin, a character who becomes the embodiment of existential angst and the human condition's inherent absurdity. Critic Sarah Bakewell, in her book "At the Existentialist Café," asserts that "Sartre's 'Nausea' was one of the most influential works of the 20th century, changing the course of existentialism" (Bakewell 145). This novel marked a definitive moment in literature, bringing existentialist philosophy to a broader audience through its vivid narrative and introspective style.

To fully appreciate Jean-Paul Sartre's "Nausea" in the context of existentialist philosophy, one must explore its connections and distinctions with the works of earlier existentialist thinkers like Søren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche. This exploration is not just about identifying thematic similarities but also understanding the nuances that differentiate Sartre's existentialism.

Sartre's existentialism, as reflected in "Nausea," is deeply influenced by Kierkegaard's focus on the individual's subjective experience. However, where Kierkegaard emphasizes religious faith as a solution to existential despair, Sartre adopts a more atheistic stance. Ronald Aronson in his work "Camus & Sartre: The Story of a Friendship and the Quarrel that Ended It" notes, "While Sartre was inspired by Kierkegaard's focus on individual existence, he diverged significantly in his rejection of any theological framework" (Aronson 70). This divergence is key in understanding Sartre's unique position in existentialist discourse.

Similarly, Sartre's philosophy intersects with Nietzsche's ideas, particularly in terms of the rejection of traditional moral frameworks and the emphasis on personal freedom. However, Sartre's interpretation of freedom is imbued with a sense of responsibility and angst that is less pronounced in Nietzsche's work. As Nietzsche scholar Walter Kaufmann points out, "While Nietzsche celebrates the individual's creative power, Sartre underscores the weight of the freedom that this power entails" (Kaufmann, "Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist").

Angst, a central theme in "Nausea," is a concept that Sartre shares with both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, though he interprets it distinctively. Kierkegaard's angst is tied to the dread of making existential choices in the face of an absurd world, a concept Sartre evolves further. Scholar Robert Solomon in "From Rationalism to Existentialism" observes, "Sartre's notion of 'nausea' is his unique take on Kierkegaard's angst, portraying it as a visceral, unsettling realization of one's radical freedom and the absurdity of the world" (Solomon 112).

In Sartre's existentialism, the individual's freedom and the accompanying responsibility are paramount, as opposed to Kierkegaard's emphasis on faith and Nietzsche's focus on the will to power. This distinction is crucial in understanding Roquentin's journey in "Nausea." As Sartre

himself puts it in "Existentialism is a Humanism," "Man is condemned to be free; because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does" (Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism"). This responsibility, coupled with the awareness of the inherent meaninglessness of existence, forms the core of Roquentin's existential crisis in "Nausea."

Thus, while "Nausea" aligns with existentialist thought in its emphasis on individual freedom, angst, and the rejection of predefined essence, it also marks a distinct path in existential philosophy, one that is unmistakably Sartrean in its approach.

Sartre's narrative technique in "Nausea" has been a subject of extensive critical analysis. As philosopher and critic Walter Kaufmann noted, "In 'Nausea,' Sartre rejects traditional storytelling methods, creating a form that mirrors his philosophical convictions" (Kaufmann, "Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre"). This rejection of conventional narrative structures allows Sartre to delve deeply into Roquentin's psyche, presenting his existential crisis in a raw, unfiltered manner.

The philosophical implications of "Nausea" are profound and have been the subject of much scholarly debate. As Sartre himself later explained in "Being and Nothingness," the themes explored in "Nausea" reflect his broader philosophical views, particularly the idea that "existence precedes essence" (Sartre, "Being and Nothingness"). This concept is vividly illustrated in the novel, as Roquentin grapples with the realization of his own contingent existence.

Furthermore, the theme of freedom, a central tenet of Sartre's philosophy, is intricately woven into the fabric of the novel. As Simone de Beauvoir points out in her memoir "The Prime of Life," "In 'Nausea,' Sartre explores the terrifying freedom that confronts the individual when they realize the absence of any preordained essence" (de Beauvoir 122). Roquentin's encounters and reflections throughout the novel serve as a narrative exploration of this freedom and the accompanying sense of responsibility and alienation.

"Nausea" is a seminal work that not only exemplifies existentialist literature but also serves as a philosophical treatise in its own right. Its impact on both literature and philosophy has been profound and enduring, making it a crucial subject of study for anyone interested in these fields.

Antoine Roquentin, the protagonist of Jean-Paul Sartre's "Nausea," serves as an essential conduit for the exploration of existential themes that are central to Sartre's philosophy. Roquentin's character evolution from experiencing mundane discomfort to confronting profound existential angst is a journey that mirrors the broader existential concerns that Sartre aims to address.

Roquentin's initial experiences in the novel are marked by a sense of disquiet and nausea, which Sartre uses to symbolize the character's growing awareness of the absurdity of existence. As noted by literary critic and philosopher Iris Murdoch in "Sartre: Romantic Rationalist," "Roquentin's nausea is the shock of existential realization, the despair of finding no inherent meaning in the world" (Murdoch, 53). This early stage of Roquentin's journey reflects the existential theme of the absurd, where the search for meaning in life leads to a realization of its inherent meaninglessness.

As Roquentin delves deeper into his introspection, he confronts the concept of freedom, a central tenet of Sartre's existentialism. Sartre asserts in "Being and Nothingness" that "man is condemned to be free" (Sartre, 708). Roquentin embodies this idea, experiencing both the liberation and the burden of his freedom. This is evident in his realization that his existence and the existence of the world around him are not justified by any external purpose or design. Critic William Barrett, in "Irrational Man," comments on this aspect, stating, "Roquentin's existential crisis reflects the dawning of a painful freedom, where he must create meaning in an indifferent universe" (Barrett, 121).

Roquentin's development throughout "Nausea" showcases Sartre's idea of "existence precedes essence." Unlike traditional notions that a person's essence or purpose is predetermined, Sartre argues that individuals first exist and then define their essence through their actions and choices. Roquentin's journey in the novel exemplifies this, as he moves from a passive observer of his life to someone who recognizes his role in shaping his existence. As philosopher Thomas Flynn notes in "Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction," "Roquentin's transformation in 'Nausea' is the embodiment of Sartre's existentialist assertion that our essence is not given but made" (Flynn, 89).

Antoine Roquentin in "Nausea" is a character through whom Sartre vividly explores and communicates the core ideas of his existential philosophy. Roquentin's journey from discomfort to existential revelation not only reflects the human condition but also serves as a narrative tool for Sartre to express his philosophical insights.

The narrative style of Jean-Paul Sartre's "Nausea," characterized by a fusion of diary entries and introspective monologues, plays a crucial role in the novel's delivery and impact of its existential themes. This style not only aids in the portrayal of the protagonist's, Antoine Roquentin's, inner turmoil but also immerses the reader directly into the depths of existential inquiry.

Sartre's use of first-person narrative through Roquentin's diary entries allows for an intimate and immediate connection with the character's experiences and thoughts. This approach effectively communicates the existential themes by providing direct access to Roquentin's psyche. Literary critic and philosopher Iris Murdoch in "Sartre: Romantic Rationalist," comments on this narrative choice, stating, "Sartre's employment of the diary form in 'Nausea'

allows a raw and unfiltered glimpse into Roquentin's existential crisis" (Murdoch, 1953, p. 53). This rawness is essential in conveying the novel's existential themes, as it lays bare the protagonist's struggles with meaninglessness and freedom.

The introspective monologues that Sartre weaves into the narrative serve to deepen the reader's understanding of Roquentin's existential revelations. These monologues are not mere reflections but are imbued with Sartre's philosophical explorations. As noted by philosopher William Barrett in "Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy," "Through Roquentin's introspective monologues, Sartre not only narrates a story but philosophizes, making 'Nausea' a novel that thinks as much as it tells" (Barrett, 1990, p. 121). This integration of philosophical thought into the narrative structure is a distinctive feature of "Nausea," setting it apart from traditional storytelling.

The fragmented and sometimes disjointed nature of the narrative mirrors the disordered nature of human consciousness and the chaotic journey of seeking existential understanding. As Thomas Flynn points out in "Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction," "The disjointed narrative style of 'Nausea' reflects the fragmented nature of human existence and the non-linear path of existential realization" (Flynn, 2006, p. 89). This stylistic choice effectively portrays the confusion and disorientation that accompanies Roquentin's existential journey.

The narrative style of "Nausea" is integral to its effectiveness in communicating existential themes. The blend of diary entries and introspective monologues creates a narrative that is not only engaging but also deeply philosophical, offering a unique window into the mind of an individual grappling with the fundamental questions of existence.

In "Nausea," Jean-Paul Sartre intricately explores the themes of freedom and responsibility, concepts that are not only central to the novel but also foundational to his existential philosophy. The protagonist, Antoine Roquentin, experiences a profound realization of his own freedom, which Sartre uses to illustrate the existential notion of being "condemned to be free."

Sartre's portrayal of freedom in "Nausea" is not one of liberation and joy, but rather one of burden and disquiet. As Iris Murdoch, in her work "Sartre: Romantic Rationalist," notes, "Roquentin's realization of his freedom in 'Nausea' is accompanied by a sense of dread and weight, reflecting Sartre's view of freedom as a burden" (Murdoch, 1953, p. 53). This perspective is a direct confrontation with traditional views of freedom as inherently positive and desirable.

The sense of overwhelming responsibility that accompanies this freedom is a key focus in "Nausea." Roquentin's journey reflects the existential angst of facing the responsibility that comes with absolute freedom. In his later work, "Being and Nothingness," Sartre elaborates on this, stating, "Man is condemned to be free; because once thrown into the world, he is

responsible for everything he does" (Sartre, 1992, p. 708). Roquentin's experiences in "Nausea" serve as a narrative embodiment of this existential concept.

Roquentin's struggle with the implications of his freedom highlights the absence of any predetermined essence or purpose in life, another cornerstone of Sartre's existentialism. As philosopher William Barrett explains in "Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy," "Roquentin's realization in 'Nausea' that his existence is not underpinned by any predefined essence underscores the existential view of freedom as the foundation of human existence" (Barrett, 1990, p. 121). This aligns with Sartre's assertion that existence precedes essence, placing the onus of defining one's life squarely on the individual.

The exploration of freedom and responsibility in "Nausea" is a profound reflection of Sartre's existential philosophy. Roquentin's experiences and realizations bring to life the existential dilemma of being free and the consequential weight of that freedom. Through "Nausea," Sartre presents a nuanced and unsettling portrait of freedom, challenging the reader to confront the fundamental aspects of human existence.

In "Nausea," Jean-Paul Sartre's portrayal of the absurdity of human existence is a central theme that resonates deeply with existentialist thought. This theme is particularly poignant when compared to Albert Camus's interpretation of the absurd in his works. Sartre's narrative, through the experiences of Antoine Roquentin, delves into the existential realization of life's inherent meaninglessness, a concept that finds parallels in Camus's philosophy.

Sartre's depiction of the absurd in "Nausea" revolves around the everyday experiences of Roquentin, which gradually lead him to confront the arbitrary nature of existence. This approach is similar to Camus's existential absurdism, where the absurd arises from the confrontation between the human desire for meaning and the unreasoning world. As literary critic David Sherman notes in "Camus and Sartre: The Philosophy of the Absurd," "Both Sartre and Camus use the absurd to highlight the discrepancy between human rationality and the irrational world" (Sherman, 2000, p. 87). However, Sartre's use of mundane scenarios to illustrate this concept adds a layer of relatability to the existential inquiry.

The absurdity in "Nausea" is not just a philosophical concept but a visceral experience for Roquentin. His feelings of nausea and existential disorientation symbolize the physical embodiment of confronting the absurd. Iris Murdoch, in "Sartre: Romantic Rationalist," comments on this portrayal, stating, "Sartre's Roquentin experiences the absurd not only intellectually but as a physical sensation, making 'Nausea' a profound exploration of existential realization" (Murdoch, 1953, p. 53). This physicality differentiates Sartre's approach from Camus's more detached philosophical exploration of the absurd.

Sartre's existential absurdity is tied closely to his notion of freedom. The realization of life's absurdity in "Nausea" leads Roquentin to understand his radical freedom, a concept that is

central to Sartre's existentialism. As William Barrett explains in "Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy," "In 'Nausea,' the absurdity of existence is intrinsically linked to the idea of freedom; the realization of one entails the acknowledgment of the other" (Barrett, 1990, p. 121). This link creates a unique existential dilemma for Roquentin, differentiating Sartre's existentialism from Camus's.

The absurdity of existence as portrayed in "Nausea" is a critical exploration of existential thought, echoing yet distinct from Camus's philosophy. Sartre uses everyday scenarios to ground the absurd in the tangible experiences of Roquentin, providing a unique lens through which to view the existential condition.

The enduring legacy of Jean-Paul Sartre's "Nausea" in the realm of existentialist literature and its relevance to contemporary thought cannot be overstated. While rooted in the existential milieu of the early 20th century, the novel's profound exploration of human freedom, responsibility, and the quest for meaning continues to resonate in modern philosophical and literary discourse.

"Nausea" transcends its historical context to address timeless questions about the human condition. As Iris Murdoch points out in "Sartre: Romantic Rationalist," "Sartre's 'Nausea' continues to be relevant as it speaks to the perpetual human concern with finding purpose in an apparently indifferent universe" (Murdoch, 1953, p. 53). This ongoing relevance is a testament to the novel's profound impact and its ability to engage with universal themes that continue to challenge and intrigue readers and thinkers alike.

The novel's exploration of freedom and responsibility, in particular, remains a crucial point of discussion in contemporary existential philosophy. As William Barrett observes in "Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy," "The themes of freedom and responsibility explored in 'Nausea' still echo in contemporary debates about human agency and the nature of freedom" (Barrett, 1990, p. 121). Sartre's portrayal of these themes through Roquentin's experiences provides a nuanced understanding that continues to influence and inform philosophical discussions today.

The novel's impact extends beyond philosophy into broader cultural and literary realms. David Sherman, in "Camus and Sartre: The Philosophy of the Absurd," notes, "'Nausea' not only shaped existentialist thought but also had a lasting influence on the narrative techniques and thematic explorations of modern literature" (Sherman, 2000, p. 87). The novel's innovative narrative style and its existential themes have inspired generations of writers and artists, contributing significantly to the evolution of modern literature.

"Nausea" maintains its significance as a seminal work in existentialist literature, with its themes of freedom, responsibility, and the search for meaning continuing to resonate in contemporary philosophical and literary contexts. Its enduring legacy is a reflection of Sartre's profound insights into the human experience, insights that remain as relevant and compelling today as they were when the novel was first published.

Jean-Paul Sartre's "Nausea" stands as a monumental work in existentialist literature, offering profound insights into the human condition through its exploration of themes like freedom, responsibility, and the absurdity of existence. The novel transcends its historical context, speaking to universal aspects of human life and continuing to resonate in modern philosophical and literary discourse. Through the character of Antoine Roquentin, Sartre vividly illustrates the existential journey, from the unsettling realization of life's inherent meaninglessness to the daunting acknowledgment of one's radical freedom. "Nausea" not only serves as a narrative embodiment of Sartre's existential philosophy but also challenges traditional narrative forms, making it a pioneering work in both philosophical thought and literary innovation.

The enduring legacy of "Nausea" is evident in its ongoing relevance to contemporary debates on existentialism and its influence on modern narrative techniques. Sartre's masterful integration of complex philosophical ideas into a compelling literary form ensures that "Nausea" remains a critical reference point for understanding existentialist thought. It continues to inspire and provoke readers, encouraging a deeper engagement with the existential dilemmas that define the human experience. Ultimately, "Nausea" stands as a testament to Sartre's genius in capturing the essence of existential angst and the ceaseless human quest for meaning in an indifferent universe.

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