

Bring the Pain? An Examination of Human Suffering in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*

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Abstract

Human suffering is a complex phenomenon that can manifest physically or psychologically. As the negative valence of affective phenomena, with the positive being pleasure or happiness, human suffering could easily be interpreted as something to avoid. Sartre explored existential aspects of human suffering in *Being and Nothingness*. Examining each occurrence of the word *suffering* in that work provides a basis for understanding the roles Sartre assigned to it within the human experience and consequently provides a more nuanced appreciation of this complex phenomenon. An electronic copy of *Being and Nothingness* was searched for all occurrences of the word *suffering* (N = 50), tabularized using the Key Word In Context (KWIC) approach at the sentence level, resulting in 40 sentences for thematic analysis. That analysis resulted in 5 themes, showing the complexity of suffering in Sartre's major philosophical work and suggesting that suffering is quintessentially human, unavoidable, and potentially liberating.

Keywords

Analysis, Anguish, Emotions, Existentialism, Linguistics, Pain, Philosophy, Themes, Transcendence

1. Introduction

Freedom and authenticity reside at the core of Sartre's existentialism. Human suffering, while acknowledged as part of his work, does not occupy as privileged a position. Such subordination is consequential as Sartrean suffering holds potential revolutionary potential. Consequentially, human suffering might be more than something only to be endured. Can the revolutionary potential of suffering bind us together through an awareness of our solidarity in human suffering? An examination of *suffering* in Sartre's (1994) *Being and Nothingness* provides a

basis for answering this question.

Sartre can be understood both as an existentialist philosopher (Brown, 1948; Marcuse, 1948; Tulloch, 1952) and as a public intellectual (Fatsis, 2018; McBride, 2013; Oslender, 2007). Sartre's works range from the philosophical (Natanson & Natanson, 1962; Pleydell-Pearce, 1970) to the political (Bondy, 1967; Knee, 1991; Sprinker, 1985), and from the psychological (Cannon, 1999; Flynn, 2016; Mirvish, 2020) to the dramatic (Jarrett-Kerr, 1957; Kovács, 2006), and they remain relevant to those interrogating the human condition and its implications for understanding, solidarity, and revolutionary praxis. O'Donohoe (2005) explained, "Sartre matters because so many fundamental points of his analysis of the human reality are right and true, and because their accuracy and veracity entail *real consequences* for our lives as individuals and in social groups" (*emphasis retained*, p. 7). What role, if any, suffering plays in these dynamics is delimited inadequately. Before understanding the potential revolutionary role of human suffering in social contexts, examining suffering more broadly and generally is useful (Hall et al., 2010; Kanov, 2021; Kellehear, 2009).

Suffering is a complex phenomenon (Carel & Kidd, 2019; Cassell, 2001; Kahn & Steeves, 1986; Svenaeus, 2014) that can manifest physically (Bernstein et al., 2008; Chapman & Gavrin, 1999) and psychologically (Ekstedt & Fagerberg, 2005; Miller, 2004; Morse, 2001). As the negative valence of affective phenomena, with the positive being pleasure or happiness, suffering could be interpreted as something to avoid (Buechler, 2010; Connelly, 2009; Koopmann-Holm et al., 2020). Sartre explored existential aspects of suffering in *Being and Nothingness* (Landau, 2012; Tremault, 2009).

This study contains a survey of literature in which research related to *Being and Nothingness*, human suffering, and Sartrean suffering are explored. Following the survey of literature, the research method and results are presented. Lastly, the study's limitations are presented before a summary of the results and their implications in the conclusion. Given the contextual value established through a review of previous research, the survey of literature is presented next.

2. Human Suffering, *Being and Nothingness*, and Sartrean Suffering

Sartre is a complex individual. To understand this research on Sartrean suffering, as developed in *Being and Nothingness*, it is useful to address first his background and some key features of his existentialism. From the dustjacket of *Being and Nothingness* (Sartre, 1994), Sartre was described as a philosopher, teacher, dramatist, novelist, political activist, and journalist. During World War II, Sartre was active in the French Resistance. He was a leading public intellectual in post-war France. Whereas it would be too reductionist to conclude what Sartre's existentialism *is*, it is possible and beneficial to delimit some of its main themes. West (2008) summarized Sartre's existentialism as including a focus on individuals as purposeful beings, who are fundamentally free, with values that are relative, subjective, and a consequence not a determinant of action, and that our ex-

periences are subjective. These brief biographic and philosophic elements of Sartre provide context for the subsequent analysis of the form and function of Sartrean suffering.

Prior to developing a comprehensive, thematic analysis of the form and function of Sartrean suffering, as contained in *Being and Nothingness*, it is helpful to explore previous research on suffering (Section 2.1), *Being and Nothingness* (Section 2.2), and Sartrean suffering (Section 2.3). These three interrelated sections provide a researched, contextual basis for the thematic analysis in this study. Given its foundational quality, the exploration of research on human suffering is presented first.

2.1. Human Suffering

Human suffering is a complex phenomenon. Rodgers and Cowles (1997) explained, “the individual and subjective nature of suffering contribute to the overall complex nature of this concept. Since suffering cannot be readily observed or measured, it has a unique, mystery and abstractness” (p. 1050). Often when human suffering is addressed, it is done so in the context of dying (Cacciatore et al., 2015; Kellehear, 2009; Vitillo, 2015). Additionally, and to a degree relatedly, human suffering is addressed also theologically (Boyle, 2003; Kilby, 2020; McWilliams, 1980) and existentially (Binder, 2022; Schubert et al., 2019; Wong et al., 2022). Human suffering in its existential context is of most interest here, given the focus and intent of this study. Walters (2007) explained that “human suffering is...a central theme in the thinking and writing of *all* existentialists” (*emphasis retained*, p. 309). Within modern society, there is a benefit from situating existential human suffering within the context of organizations, as one’s employment influences aspects of one’s well-being (Cole et al., 2009; Fritsch et al., 2019; Stam et al., 2016). Examining human suffering within the context of organizations, Driver (2007) noted that “suffering is linked intimately to the discovery of existential meaning” (p. 612) and that “organizations are contexts in which suffering occurs” (p. 622). This suffering may or may not be observable to others. Jackson (2022) explained that within the context of organizations, “managers frequently suffer in silence” (p. 31). These manifestations of human suffering could result from viewing humans as resources to be applied for increasing operational efficiency. Ormaechea et al. (2022) contend that “the current way of considering human beings as resources in organizations has resulted in an increase in suffering in jobs” (p. 104). Research on human suffering suggests linkages among existentialism and organizational theory that can be further developed by examining research related to a narrower focus on Sartrean suffering. Before examining Sartrean Suffering (Section 2.3), it is useful first to explore the breadth of research related to Sartre’s major, philosophical work, *Being and Nothingness* (Section 2.2).

2.2. Being and Nothingness

Sartre’s (1994) *Being and Nothingness* is generally considered to be one of the

major works of existentialist philosophy. Even more broadly, Rowlands (2011) contends that *Being and Nothingness* is “one of the great works of twentieth-century philosophy” (p. 180). As such, this work figures prominently in research related to many diverse aspects of applied philosophy. Within that context, this work of Sartre has been examined in terms of freedom (Due, 2005; Landau, 2012; Lightbody, 2009; Liu, 2022), epistemology (Busch, 2011; Due, 2000; Eshleman, 2020), intentionality (Dinan, 1971; Elveton, 2007; Llewelyn, 1978), and ethics (Plantinga, 1958; Westcott, 1963), among others. Whereas each of these elements provides something of use to understanding and praxis, it is beneficial to narrow one’s focus to the minimum element of focus necessary for one’s purpose. Given its revolutionary potential, Sartre’s notion of freedom, as addressed in *Being and Nothingness*, is of most relevance to this study. Philosophically, it is helpful to define what freedom is and what it is not. For Lightbody, Sartrean freedom “is neither a positive property nor an essential aspect of human being: we do not have freedom as if we ‘possessed’ free will” (p. 86). Whereas Sartrean freedom lacks the characteristics of positive properties and the ability to possess it directly, it still holds the potential to shape aspects of individual and social existence. Liu explained, “Sartre’s account of freedom has always had implications and repercussions for how we understand ourselves and even how we reform society” (p. 180). This ability to reform society through understanding Sartrean freedom is particularly interesting to those interested in revolutionary change. Somewhat paradoxically, the impetus for such revolutions is potentially found in human suffering. Making such a conceptual linkage more directly is facilitated by examining research related to Sartrean suffering.

2.3. Sartrean Suffering

Just as human suffering is a complex phenomenon, Sartrean suffering is not a single thing but a complex web of attributes and implications. Much of the analysis of Sartrean suffering has focused on his works of literary fiction (Glicksberg, 1949; Webber, 2009), psychology (Bering, 2008; Iuculano & Burkum, 1996; Quackenbush et al., 2016), and authenticity (Engels, 2014; Handerek, 2009; Jackson, 2005; Lindholm, 2013). Within the framework of Sartrean suffering developed for this study, the concept of authenticity is particularly relevant for delimiting the types of understandings that enable revolutionary action. As Jackson explained, “the authenticity with which we face our freedom seems to be the chief criterion for judging persons and their actions.” This value to Sartre is “not in narrow instrumental reason, but in being reflectively conscious of our human condition and standing well in relation to our essential freedom” (p. 308). Such an understanding of our human freedom can confront and undermine the status quo through subversion. In exploring Sartre’s notion of authenticity, Charmé (1991) explained, “authenticity, thus, is a subversive power that destabilizes the tempting desire for orderly categories and certainties, and wages guerilla warfare on the manifold forms of bad faith” (pp. 253-254). Whereas there has been re-

search conducted on aspects of Sartrean suffering, there has yet to be a comprehensive, thematic analysis of the form, function, and implications of Sartrean suffering as developed in *Being and Nothingness*. This research was designed to fill that gap in the existing research.

This survey of literature provides a shared contextual basis for understanding existent research on human suffering (Section 2.1), *Being and Nothingness* (Section 2.2), and Sartrean suffering (Section 2.3). Collectively, that research points to the need for and the utility of a comprehensive thematic analysis of suffering in Sartre's (1994) *Being and Nothingness*. The method used to do so is described in the following section.

3. Method

This study used a thematic analysis conducted at the sentence level for all observations of the word *suffering* occurring within Sartre's (1994) *Being and Nothingness*. The overview of this research method covers the process used to obtain an electronic copy of *Being and Nothingness*, the term identification method used, the Key Word In Context (KWIC) approach, and the process used for thematic categorization. Since there would be no text analysis without the work itself, the process used to obtain an electronic copy of *Being and Nothingness* is presented first.

A free, electronic PDF copy of Sartre's (1994) *Being and Nothingness* was obtained from the Internet Archive (<https://shorturl.at/vDEH3>). The electronic copy of the text was crosschecked against a physical copy to ensure completeness and accuracy. Once content verification was complete, the term *suffering* was input into the pdf search window to locate all observations of that term within the text. Each observation was assigned a sequential index value (e.g., 1 for observation 1, 2 for observation 2, etc.), with KWIC being conducted at the sentence level. Prior to describing KWIC in more detail, it is helpful to note that this approach can result in fewer sentences for thematic analysis than the number of observations of the term, as a given KWIC sentence might contain at least one reference to the term *suffering*, but it could contain two or more. With this in mind, providing insight into the KWIC method is useful.

As the name implies, KWIC focuses on contextualizing a given word of focus. As indicated, the key word for this study is *suffering*. Jockers (2014) explained that KWIC searches "are a standard way of addressing...[the] observation that you will know a word's meaning or sense by looking at the other words around it, that is, by its context" (p. 73). Such an approach is important, as Brezina (2018) explained, "identifying key words is one of the crucial techniques in corpus linguistics" (p. 79). The use of KWIC is well established and is observable across different areas of focus, including law (Kraft, 1964; Sopjani & Hamiti, 2022), political discourse (Douglas & Douglas, 2021; Jackson & Heath, 2023; Jones, 2019; Pennings, 2010), and media studies (Duffy et al., 2020; Fox et al., 2023; Soroka & Wlezien, 2019; Zhou, 2022). The KWIC approach used in this

study was focused on contextualizing the term *suffering* at the sentence level of observation. Once the observations were tabularized, they were interpreted thematically. The approach used for thematic categorization is presented next.

Thematic categorization, as implemented in this study, is a step towards the development of a taxonomy of Sartrean suffering. Braun and Clarke (2006) defined thematic analysis as “a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (p. 79). Thematic analysis has been applied in contexts as varied as business (Christ, 1970; Gupta & Levenburg, 2010; Nicholas & McDowall, 2012) to social work (Clark et al., 2023; Labra et al., 2020; O’Connor, 2020), and from military (Hale, 2012; Rafferty et al., 2013; Tunnell, 2015) to peace studies (Almusaly, 2017; De la Rey & McKay, 2006; Matusitz, 2022). Understanding the context is important as it potentially influences communication style and approach (Reboulet & Jackson, 2021). The thematic analysis for this study followed the following procedural steps. The first step was an independent review of each sentence by the authors. This initial step aimed to generate a list of potential themes. The second step was discussing the proposed thematic categories and standardizing a theme taxonomy to code each sentence. The third step was for each author to independently code each sentence using the agreed-upon theme taxonomy. Upon completion, the fourth step in the process was comparing the initial results, noting the degree of initial assessment agreement on theme assignments, and the final adjudication of theme for those observations that were dissimilarly coded in the initial assessment. Once the final themes were assigned, the sentences were partitioned into their respective thematic categories, and a close reading (DuBois, 2003; Smith, 2016) of the sentences in each thematic category was conducted. The results of which hold potential for understanding better Sartrean suffering.

As presented, this study used thematic categorization to interpret the KWIC of the word *suffering*, at the sentence level, in Sartre’s (1994) *Being and Nothingness*. Such an approach, while subjective, provided an opportunity to synthesize observed variations in Sartrean suffering and to posit its functions and limitations existentially. The following results convey those insights.

4. Results

Analyzing Sartre’s *Being and Nothing*, consistent with the approach described in the method section, resulted in 50 occurrences of the term *suffering* in 40 sentences. In the aggregate, these manifestations convey that suffering in this work is a multifaceted phenomenon. Before presenting the thematic groupings of Sartrean suffering observed in this study, reviewing the entire collection of sentences is beneficial. These observations are presented in **Table 1**.

The summary of statements presented in **Table 1** provided a point for examining *suffering* in Sartre’s (1994) *Being and Nothingness*. Each sentence offers value and is worthy of contemplation. Whereas there is value in such close readings, there is value achieved too through analyzing the statements as occurring

Table 1. Comprehensive summary of statements on suffering in *being and nothingness*.

No.	Page	Statement
1	90	The being of human reality is suffering because it rises in being as perpetually haunted by a totality which it is without being able to be it, precisely because it could not attain the in-itself without losing itself as for-itself.
2	91	This norm or totality of the affective self is directly present as a lack suffered in the very heart of suffering.
3	91	One suffers and one suffers from not suffering enough.
4	91	The suffering of which we speak is never exactly that which we feel.
5 - 6	91	What we call “noble” or “good” or “true” suffering and what moves us is the suffering which we read on the faces of others, better yet in portraits, in the face of a statue, in a tragic mask.
7	91	It is a suffering which has being.
8	91	We can speak of it—that suffering there which is expressed by that set of the mouth, by that frown.
9	91	Suffering is posited upon the physiognomy; it is beyond passivity as beyond activity, beyond negation as beyond affirmation—it is.
10	92	The suffering is the conscious relation to these possibilities, to this situation, but it is solidified, cast in the bronze of being.
11 - 12	92	And it is as such that it fascinates us; it stands as a degraded approximation of that suffering-in-itself which haunts our own suffering.
13 - 14	92	The suffering which I experience, on the contrary, is never adequate suffering, due to the fact that it nihilates itself as in itself by the very act by which it founds itself.
15 - 16	92	It escapes as suffering toward the consciousness of suffering.
17 - 18	92	I cannot observe it as I observe the suffering of the statue, since I make my own suffering and since I know it.
19	92	If I must suffer, I should prefer that my suffering would seize me and flow over me like a storm, but instead I must raise it not existence in my frees spontaneity.
20	92	I should like simultaneously to be it and to conquer it, but this enormous, opaque suffering, which should transport me out of myself, continues instead to touch me lightly with its wing, and I cannot grasp it.
21 - 22	92	I find only myself, myself who moans, myself who wails, myself who in order to realize this suffering which I am must play without respite the drama of suffering.
23	92	I wring my hands, I cry in order that being-in-itselfs, their sounds, their gestures may run through the world, ridden by the suffering-in-itself which I cannot be.
24	92	My suffering suffers from being what it is not and from not being what it is.
25	92	In himself he chatters incessantly, for the words of the inner language are like the outlines of the “self” of suffering.
26 - 28	92	It is for my eyes that he is “crushed” by suffering; in himself he feels himself responsible for the grief which he wills even while not wishing it and which he does not wish even while willing it, that grief which is haunted by a perpetual absence—the absence of the motionless, mute suffering which is the self, the concrete, out-of reach totality of the for-itself which suffers, the for of Human-Reality in suffering.
29	92	My real suffering is not an effort to reach to the self.
30	92	But it can be suffering only as consciousness (of) not being enough suffering in the presence of that full and absent suffering.
31	331	I do not know this suffering and I do not actually feel it.

Continued

32	355	We have seen how reflection while “suffering” physical pain constitutes it as illness.
33	356	When I am not suffering, I speak of it, I conduct myself with respect to it as with respect to an object which on principle is out of reach, for which others are the depositories.
34	421	It is in terms of my suffering, or my misery that I am collectively apprehended with others by the Third; that is, in terms of the adversity of the world, in terms of the facticity of my condition.
35	423	Each time that we use the “Us” in this sense (to designate suffering humanity, sinful humanity, to determine an objective historical meaning by considering man as an object which is developing its potentialities) we limit ourselves to indicating certain concrete experience to be undergone in the presence of the absolute Third; that is, of God.
36	434	It is to posit the diffusion in itself as insufficient; that is, as suffering from a secret nothingness.
37	435	It is on the day that we can conceive of a different state of affairs that a new light falls on our troubles and our sufferings and that we decide that these are unbearable.
38 - 39	435	But he does not represent his sufferings to himself as unbearable; he adapts himself to them not through resignation but because he lacks the education and reflection necessary for him to conceive of a social state in which these sufferings would not exist.
40	435	He suffers without considering his suffering and without conferring value upon it.
41	435	To suffer and to be are one and the same for him. His suffering is the pure affective tenor of his nonpositional consciousness, but he does not contemplate it.
42	435	Therefore this suffering cannot be in itself a motive for his acts.
43	436	It is the organized form—worker-finding-his-suffering-natural—which must be surmounted and denied in order for it to be able to form the object of a revealing contemplation.
44 - 45	436	This means evidently that it is by a pure wrenching away from himself and the world that the worker can posit his suffering as unbearable suffering and consequently can make of it the motive for his revolutionary action.
46	437	If we recall the principle which we established earlier—namely that it is the apprehension of a revolution as possible which gives to the workman’s suffering its value as a motive—we must thereby conclude that it is by fleeing a situation toward our possibility of changing it that we organize this situation into complexes of causes and motives.
47	455	But as his fatigue is nothing but the passion which he endures so that the dust of the highways, the burning of the sun, the roughness of the roads may exist to the fullest, his effort (i.e., this sweet familiarity with a fatigue which he loves, to which he abandons himself and which nevertheless he himself directs) is given as a way of appropriating the mountain, of suffering it to the end and being victor over it.
48	474	He has chosen shame and suffering, which does not mean, however, that he is to experience any joy when they are most forcefully realized.
49	474	But, to be precise, their will to be cured has for its goal the confirmation of these obsessions as sufferings and consequently the realization of them in all their strength.
50	475	It is therefore only within the compass of my fundamental project that the will can be efficacious; and I can be “freed” from my “inferiority complex” only by a radical modification of my project which could in no way find its causes and its motives in the prior project, not even in the suffering and shame which I experience, for the latter are designed expressly to realize my project of inferiority.

within a constellation of thematic groupings. Consistent with the method, each sentence was reviewed independently by the authors to generate a list of potential themes. After that first iteration, a standard set of thematic categories were

agreed upon and an independent evaluation was executed using the developed theme taxonomy. That review resulted in 19 sentences (47.5%) being coded similarly. Each of the remaining 21 sentences (52.5%) that received different, initial thematic assessments were reassessed, and an agreed-upon thematic code was determined jointly. From the review of the forty sentences, five thematic categories emerged for classifying Sartrean suffering in *Being and Nothingness* (percentage of observations): 1) inadequacies of suffering (37.5%), 2) suffering as an essential aspect of the human experience (22.5%), 3) transcendence of suffering (20%), 4) suffering as a linkage (10%), and 5) physical manifestations of suffering (10%). The sentences under each theme are presented, retaining their original reference number (**Table 1**), for ease of tracking. The statements of suffering under the theme of the inadequacies of suffering are presented in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Statements under the theme of the inadequacies of suffering.

No.	Page	Statement
2	91	This norm or totality of the affective self is directly present as a lack suffered in the very heart of suffering.
3	91	One suffers and one suffers from not suffering enough.
4	91	The suffering of which we speak is never exactly that which we feel.
11 - 12	92	And it is as such that it fascinates us; it stands as a degraded approximation of that suffering-in-itself which haunts our own suffering.
13 - 14	92	The suffering which I experience, on the contrary, is never adequate suffering, due to the fact that it nihilates itself as in itself by the very act by which it founds itself.
19	92	If I must suffer, I should prefer that my suffering would seize me and flow over me like a storm, but instead I must raise it not existence in my frees spontaneity.
20	92	I should like simultaneously to be it and to conquer it, but this enormous, opaque suffering, which should transport me out of myself, continues instead to touch me lightly with its wing, and I cannot grasp it.
24	92	My suffering suffers from being what it is not and from not being what it is.
26 - 28	92	It is for my eyes that he is “crushed” by suffering; in himself he feels himself responsible for the grief which he wills even while not wishing it and which he does not wish even while willing it, that grief which is haunted by a perpetual absence—the absence of the motionless, mute suffering which is the self, the concrete, out-of reach totality of the for-itself which suffers, the for of Human-Reality in suffering.
30	92	But it can be suffering only as consciousness (of) not being enough suffering in the presence of that full and absent suffering.
31	331	I do not know this suffering and I do not actually feel it.
36	434	It is to posit the diffusion in itself as insufficient; that is, as suffering from a secret nothingness.
42	435	Therefore this suffering cannot be in itself a motive for his acts.
48	474	He has chosen shame and suffering, which does not mean, however, that he is to experience any joy when they are most forcefully realized.
50	475	It is therefore only within the compass of my fundamental project that the will can be efficacious; and I can be “freed” from my “inferiority complex” only by a radical modification of my project which could in no way find its causes and its motives in the prior project, not even in the suffering and shame which I experience, for the latter are designed expressly to realize my project of inferiority.

Fifteen sentences (37.5%) fell under the theme of the inadequacies of suffering. Collectively, the sentences under this theme reveal that humans are unable to make the most of suffering or that suffering itself has inherent limitations. Within this theme, suffering for Sartre is marked by “a lack” (p. 91), that one “suffers from not suffering enough,” (p. 91), that suffering “is never exactly that which we feel” (p. 91), that it “stands as a degraded approximation,” (p. 92), that it is “never adequate” (p. 92), that it is “opaque” (p. 92), that suffering itself “suffers from being what it is not” (p. 92), that it is “mute” (p. 92), that it isn’t “enough” (p. 92), that it is “absent” (p. 92), that suffering “cannot be in itself a motive” for action (p. 42), that while suffering is chosen, one will not “experience any joy” when it is “most forcefully realized” (p. 474), and that experiencing suffering is how one realizes one’s “project of inferiority” (p. 475). These statements suggest that suffering for Sartre, as described in *Being and Nothingness*, is somehow inadequate. However, inadequate suffering for Sartre is essential to the human experience. Statements on the theme of the essential aspects of suffering are presented in **Table 3**.

As indicated in **Table 3**, 9 sentences (22.5%) were coded under the essential theme. This theme conveys that suffering is an essential part of the human condition. This is established unambiguously when Sartre claimed, “the being of human reality is suffering” (p. 90). In fact, Sartre went as far as to say that humans

Table 3. Statements under the theme of suffering as essential.

No.	Page	Statement
1	90	The being of human reality is suffering because it rises in being as perpetually haunted by a totality which it is without being able to be it, precisely because it could not attain the in-itself without losing itself as for-itself.
7	91	It is a suffering which has being.
10	92	The suffering is the conscious relation to these possibilities, to this situation, but it is solidified, cast in the bronze of being.
17 - 18	92	I cannot observe it as I observe the suffering of the statue, since I make my own suffering and since I know it.
21 - 22	92	I find only myself, myself who moans, myself who wails, myself who in order to realize this suffering which I am must play without respite the drama of suffering.
25	92	In himself he chatters incessantly, for the words of the inner language are like the outlines of the “self” of suffering.
29	92	My real suffering is not an effort to reach to the self.
40	435	He suffers without considering his suffering and without conferring value upon it.
41	435	To suffer and to be are one and the same for him. His suffering is the pure affective tenor of his nonpositional consciousness, but he does not contemplate it.

are “a suffering which has being” (p. 91), that it is “cast in the bronze of being” (p. 92). Further pointing to its essential quality, Sartre noted that “I make my own suffering” and that one “must play without respite the drama of suffering” (p. 92). This suffering is for Sartre “like the outlines of the ‘self’” but “is not an effort to reach to the self” (p. 92). “Without conferring value upon it,” suffering for Sartre is unavoidable as “to suffer and to be are one and the same” (p. 435). The essential quality of suffering makes it, perhaps at least in some contexts, unavoidable. When manifest, suffering can provide an experience of transcendence. Statements coded under the theme of transcendence are presented in **Table 4**.

Table 4. Statements under the theme of the transcendence of suffering.

No.	Page	Statement
15 - 16	92	It escapes as suffering toward the consciousness of suffering.
37	435	It is on the day that we can conceive of a different state of affairs that a new light falls on our troubles and our sufferings and that we decide that these are unbearable.
38 - 39	435	But he does not represent his sufferings to himself as unbearable; he adapts himself to them not through resignation but because he lacks the education and reflection necessary for him to conceive of a social state in which these sufferings would not exist.
43	436	It is the organized form—worker-finding-his-suffering-natural—which must be surmounted and denied in order for it to be able to form the object of a revealing contemplation.
44 - 45	436	This means evidently that it is by a pure wrenching away from himself and the world that the worker can posit his suffering as unbearable suffering and consequently can make of it the motive for his revolutionary action.
46	437	If we recall the principle which we established earlier—namely that it is the apprehension of a revolution as possible which gives to the workman’s suffering its value as a motive—we must thereby conclude that it is by fleeing a situation toward our possibility of changing it that we organize this situation into complexes of causes and motives.
47	455	But as his fatigue is nothing but the passion which he endures so that the dust of the highways, the burning of the sun, the roughness of the roads may exist to the fullest, his effort (i.e., this sweet familiarity with a fatigue which he loves, to which he abandons himself and which nevertheless he himself directs) is given as a way of appropriating the mountain, of suffering it to the end and being victor over it.
49	474	But, to be precise, their will to be cured has for its goal the confirmation of these obsessions as sufferings and consequently the realization of them in all their strength.

Within **Table 4** are eight sentences (20%) coded under the theme of the transcendence of suffering. As Sartre indicated, it is when “we decide that these [our thoughts and sufferings] are unbearable” that “we can conceive of a different state of affairs” (p. 435). With “education and reflection” one might be able to “conceive of a social state in which these sufferings would not exist” (p. 435), and that viewing suffering as natural “must be surmounted and denied” (p. 436), and that it can be “the motive for... revolutionary action” (p. 436). Ultimately, Sartre notes that one must experience suffering “to the end and being victor over it” (p. 455) by “the realization of them in all their strength” (p. 474). Just as Sartrean suffering, as developed in *Being and Nothingness*, holds potential for transcendence, it likewise provides a potential linkage with others. Sentences coded under the theme of linkage are presented in **Table 5**.

Table 5 contains four sentences (10%) coded under the theme of linkage. Sartre indicated that suffering can be “read on the face of others” (p. 91), suffering is something for which “others are the depositories” (p. 356), that in terms of one’s suffering one is “collectively apprehended with others” (p. 421), and that suffering can be defined in terms of “us... to designate suffering humanity” (p. 423). This linkage is not always, or predominately beneficial, as for Sartre, “we limit ourselves” in the process (p. 423). The last theme is used to characterize statements related to the physical manifestations of suffering (**Table 6**).

As indicated in **Table 6**, four sentences (10%) were coded under the theme of the physical manifestations of suffering. The physical manifestations of suffering, as described by Sartre (1994) in *Being and Nothingness*, are “expressed by that set of the mouth, by that frown” (p. 91), “upon the physiognomy” (p. 91), by the wringing of one’s hands and “their gestures” (p. 92), and through the “reflection while ‘suffering’ physical pain” (p. 355). The physical manifestations are

Table 5. Statements under the theme of suffering as a linkage.

No.	Page	Statement
5 - 6	91	What we call “noble” or “good” or “true” suffering and what moves us is the suffering which we read on the faces of others, better yet in portraits, in the face of a statue, in a tragic mask.
33	356	When I am not suffering, I speak of it, I conduct myself with respect to it as with respect to an object which on principle is out of reach, for which others are the depositories.
34	421	It is in terms of my suffering, or my misery that I am collectively apprehended with others by the Third; that is, in terms of the adversity of the world, in terms of the facticity of my condition.
35	423	Each time that we use the “Us” in this sense (to designate suffering humanity, sinful humanity, to determine an objective historical meaning by considering man as an object which is developing its potentialities) we limit ourselves to indicating certain concrete experience to be undergone in the presence of the absolute Third; that is, of God.

Table 6. Statements under the theme of physical manifestations of suffering.

No.	Page	Statement
8	91	We can speak of it—that suffering there which is expressed by that set of the mouth, by that frown.
9	91	Suffering is posited upon the physiognomy; it is beyond passivity as beyond activity, beyond negation as beyond affirmation—it is.
23	92	I wring my hands, I cry in order that being-in-itselfs, their sounds, their gestures may run through the world, ridden by the suffering-in-itself which I cannot be.
32	355	We have seen how reflection while “suffering” physical pain constitutes it as Illness.

both how we recognize the suffering of others and how we communicate to others our suffering.

Conducting a thematic analysis on the 50 occurrences of the term *suffering* in Sartre’s (1994) *Being and Nothingness* resulted in 40 sentences for KWIC analysis and the generation of 5 themes (percentage of observations): 1) inadequacies of suffering (37.5%), 2) suffering as an essential aspect of the human experience (22.5%), 3) transcendence of suffering (20%), 4) suffering as a linkage (10%), and 5) physical manifestations of suffering (10%). Collectively, these themes suggest that suffering for Sartre, at least in how it was developed in *Being and Nothingness*, is complex and multifaceted. The expression of suffering manifests itself differently depending on context, as context shapes, distorts, and influences our conscious thoughts and subconscious perceptions (Sartre, 1994). The results of this analysis suggest there is potential benefit in categorizing the content and functioning of Sartrean suffering under thematic categorization. Whereas these insights are useful, some limitations warrant attention. The most pressing of these limitations are presented in the following section.

5. Limitations

This study, while informative, suffers from a few significant limitations. First, this study is limited to a single term, *suffering*. One could extend this study to examine conceptually related terms (e.g., *agony*, *anguish*, *pain*, *torment*). Expanding the analysis to include such terms would provide a more holistic picture of Sartrean suffering in *Being and Nothingness*. Additionally, this study examined suffering in only one text. Expanding this study to encompass all of Sartre’s works would provide a comprehensive understanding of Sartrean suffering across the various times, focus, and contexts of his writings. Relatedly, the study could be expanded beyond Sartre to encompass existential works by other philosophers. Such an extension would provide insight into how suffering is addressed within existentialism. Lastly, the generation of themes, while useful, is subjective. Questions of validity are not constrained to qualitative research but exist in quantitative studies related to analysis and simulation (Heath & Jackson, 2013).

An alternative approach might be to use sentiment coding software to code themes objectively. That alternative approach would allow for replication of results but would lack the humanity of interpretation and nuance. Collectively, these limitations delimit the authoritativeness of the results. They do not, however, suggest that these results are not worthy of interrogation, contemplation, and potential adoption. Ultimately, the reader will decide if these insights are constructive to their understanding and actions.

6. Conclusion

Sartre's (1994) *Being and Nothingness* was searched for all occurrences of the word *suffering* (N = 50) and were tabularized using KWIC at the sentence level, resulting in 40 sentences for thematic analysis. The thematic analysis resulted in 5 themes (percentage of observations): 1) inadequacies of suffering (37.5%), 2) suffering as an essential aspect of the human experience (22.5%), 3) transcendence of suffering (20%), 4) suffering as a linkage (10%), and 5) physical manifestations of suffering (10%). Collectively, those five themes show the complexity of suffering in Sartre's major philosophical work. From that thematic analysis, one discovers that *suffering* for Sartre is "never adequate" (p. 92), but that "the being of human reality is suffering" (p. 90). As such, suffering is not simply something to be endured; it holds liberating potential as one works through it. For Sartre, suffering influences action by bringing focus to the "consciousness (of)" (p. 92) the element of concern. Sartre explained that suffering can be "the motive for... revolutionary action" (p. 436). Making the revolutionary potential of suffering manifest binds us together through an awareness of our solidarity in suffering. Existentially, suffering is not sought after masochistically but is embraced for its latent developmental and revolutionary potential as it is endured. Suffering is quintessentially human and potentially liberating. To the extent that inadvertent and unavoidable suffering contributes to the development of existential awareness, growth, solidarity, and revolutionary action, one might conclude that suffering is a pain worth enduring.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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