

No Longer Human: Disability, Existentialism, and the Social Absurdity of Post-War Japan

Osamu Dazai's *No Longer Human* presents a deeply unsettling and introspective exploration of mental disability through the life narrative of its protagonist, Oba Yozo, whose personal suffering is inseparably bound to the socio-political upheavals of twentieth-century Japan. Set against the backdrop of a nation grappling with the trauma of war, defeat, and rapid modernization, the novel examines how post-war social disintegration and moral instability exacerbate Yozo's psychological vulnerability. This paper critically analyzes the ways in which Yozo's extreme alienation, self-loathing, and existential despair reveal a cyclical relationship between mental disability and existentialism, wherein his inability to connect with humanity is both a symptom of his mental condition and a catalyst for its further deterioration. By situating the text within the theoretical frameworks of Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism, Albert Camus' philosophy of the Absurd, Michel Foucault's ideas of confinement and the medical gaze, and postmodern disability theories, the paper argues that Dazai's semi-autobiographical portrayal of mental disability transcends individual pathology to represent a broader societal crisis produced by rigid, ableist norms and expectations.

Yozo's psychological suffering can be traced back to his childhood, where his earliest realizations of the inherent irrationality and performative nature of human behavior mark the beginning of his estrangement from society. Unable to comprehend or internalize the unwritten codes and moral standards that govern social life, Yozo comes to perceive himself as fundamentally disqualified from being human. This sense of inadequacy and exclusion deepens into profound alienation, not only from society but also from his own self, reflecting existentialist concerns with isolation, meaninglessness, and the individual's struggle to locate authenticity in an incomprehensible world. Yozo's persistent belief that he is "no longer human" resonates strongly with existential philosophy, as his suffering stems not merely from internal psychological distress but from an acute awareness of the absurd gap between societal expectations and lived human experience.

Within this context, the novel also foregrounds the role of confinement and the medical gaze in shaping the experience of mental disability. Drawing on Foucault's critique of medicalized power structures, the paper examines how disabled individuals, once institutionalized or medically categorized, are stripped of their humanity and reduced to defective bodies or malfunctioning organs. Yozo is viewed not as a person with a unique mode of perception but as a cognitive anomaly requiring correction or containment. This reductionist gaze fails to acknowledge the legitimacy of his questioning of social norms and values, instead pathologizing his difference as deviance. *No Longer Human* thus exposes the intense desire of the "disabled" subject to be recognized as human—to be seen as a person before a diagnosis, and to be accepted within a society that equates normalcy with worth.

Ultimately, this paper seeks to evoke empathy and critical reflection within a society that continues to marginalize those who suffer from mental illness. By tracing Yozo's journey through trauma, alienation, and existential questioning, the paper demonstrates that Dazai's narrative operates as both a critique of societal attitudes toward mental health and a philosophical meditation on the fragility of human identity itself. Through its portrayal of disability as inseparable from social structures and existential conditions, *No Longer Human* invites readers to interrogate their own definitions of humanity, normalcy, and belonging, and to reconsider the ethical responsibility of society toward those who exist at its margins.