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# **Nature of human existence in Kierkegaard's ethical philosophy: A step towards self-valuation and transformation in our contemporary world**

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**Abstract:** Man as an existent in the world, is an individual substance of a rational nature hence in his becomingness, his unique self-conscious actions are imperatives of what he becomes. Thus to take subjectivity from human nature and reduce it to abstract objectivity and systemization as Hegel did, is to relegate to a background the importance, uniqueness and individuality of the human person as a being in the world. Kierkegaard refutes Hegel's objectivity with subjectivity and its analysis and relevance to understanding the nature of human existence for the singular purpose of self-valuation and transformation in our contemporary world, is the onus of this study. However, certain questions abound; what is subjectivity and human existence in Kierkegaard ethical philosophy? What life experiences influenced such understanding? To what extent does this enhance human understanding of existence? What implications does this propose in the scope of existentialism and ethics of human actions in our world today? With the critical analysis and hermeneutics method, the research examines Kierkegaard philosophy and concludes with the affirmation that to overcome the existential challenges of our contemporary world, man must constantly exclude himself from the crowd, engage in self-examination and value oriented commitment to purposeful living.

**Keywords:** Existence, Human, Objectivity, Stages, Subjectivity

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## **1. Introduction**

You will agree with me that the challenges in our contemporary world impact highly on human day to day life at all levels and leaves us with so many complexities to eventually falling into the disposition to 'follow the trend' for survival each day. Consequently, certain fundamental questions arising from the predicament of our time ranging from ethical, ecological, technological, religious, political, socio-cultural and economical can be anchored on this. Today we witness the weakness in human authenticity in nearly every facet of human society and endeavors as everyone is almost a blind copy of this or that person. A close observation shows that majority of our actions are not borne out of deep and critical reflection or consideration on the implications of our actions rather from certain groups or societal influences We also witness a misunderstanding and interpretation of certain concepts in our contemporary world. The concept of justice, love, life itself, pleasure,

freedom, choice, individuality, community, service, integrity, family, Christianity, ethics or morals, respect, wealth, poverty, success, existence, marriage, friendship, to mention but a few. This has heightened in me the need to critically analyze the ambiguity of an unreflective attitude and disinterestedness in self-transformation and valuation predominant in our time and these no doubt are the origin and causes of anxiety, fulfillment and even crimes.

Typically, existentialists take the existing human being as a starting point. For them, the existing human being is distinct from objective nature as a whole because she is a subject, undetermined by laws of nature. She is distinct from previous modern, Western philosophical conceptions of the subject such those of the Cartesian<sup>[1]</sup> Watson (2009) because she is subjective not just as a thinker but as one who acts. Again, she is distinct because she is preoccupied with the problematic finitude of her existence as a being in the world. This last distinction is of intense importance. Existence understood as a distinctive way of being, is the common and fundamental concern of thinkers such as

Albert Camus, Friedrich Martin Buber, Paul Tillich, Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel, Karl Rahner, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre many others and Soren Kierkegaard whose philosophy we shall here in examine more closely to crystallize that it is a foundation for self-valuation and transformation in our contemporary world.

Our contemporary age like the times of Kierkegaard, is recording the loss of what it means to be an individual and the facets of modern society contributes to this dissolution. Through its production of the false idol of "the public"<sup>[2]</sup>, (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy-Søren Kierkegaard) the individuals is distracted from himself to a mass public, abstractions, communal dreams, and fantasies. It is helped in this task by the media and the mass production of products to keep it distracted. Daily problems of existence and preoccupations in the phenomenological world sometimes isolate us from engaging in self-reflection to fully understanding ourselves and deal with questions that impugn our very nature so as to realize our purpose in an ever changing world. We often focus on the thought of a group or majority or others to the detriment of the interest of our unique individuality. Other than being an authentic individual, man is therefore subsumed in the crowd thus losing his individuality to abstract objective or societal control. Even the fight for temporal equality is a distraction 'What does it mean therefore to be an existing human being in our contemporary world?', is an energetic question gingering this study on Soren Kierkegaard.

The prodigy, man, in his quest for knowledge; the understanding of himself, his enigmatic nature and his environment have been met with some unresolved pertinent questions. Fundamental to these are: What is the origin of being? What is the purpose of human existence? *et cetera...* It is on this backdrop that Soren Kierkegaard<sup>[3]</sup> Watts, (1968) dabbles into the question of human existence. For him, the individual alone can fashion his own life through reflection on himself by excluding himself from the crowd, so as to give meaning to his existence. In explaining his position, Kierkegaard proposed three stages of life in human existence: the aesthetic, ethical, and religious stages<sup>[4]</sup> Kierkegaard, (1846); through which one can come to the actualization of his essence. For Kierkegaard to exist is to be an individual who strives, who considers alternatives, who chooses, who decides, and who, above all, makes a commitment more importantly, for ensuring pragmatic commitment, worthy of making the individual sound, critical and analytical minded in making decisions for his very life. How he arrives at this conclusion from his notion of human existence is a question behind this study which aims primarily besides others, at re-orienting the contemporary world on the fact that self-transformation and valuation is only possible if man makes personal decision out of deep personal reflection and free exercise of his will power while being ready to take responsibilities for is subjective decisions than objective crowd following. Bearing in mind the scope of epistemology which deals with the nature of knowledge among other things, this work

is aimed at revealing such knowledge that qualifies such a conclusion on human nature by examining critically Soren Kierkegaard philosophy. Ethically, this work will re-orient people on what it takes to be 'man' or a 'human person', whom nothing can be replaced with in the society as he is an absolute value, an end in itself and not a means to an end, as individual, substantial and rational being. It is quite certain that the study of the human person or man in philosophical discussion, has acquired a large volume of thought provoking existentialist literatures, therefore to ensure an critical and comprehensive study of the nature of man in Kierkegaard's philosophy towards self-transformation and valuation in the contemporary world, one must depend largely on the works of Kierkegaard. However Kierkegaard's philosophy refer to some philosophical central issues such as: *hermeneutical overthrow*, the *origins of anxiety*, *allowed and disallowed*, the redefinition of theological and philosophical concepts, *pseudonyms* and *indirect communication* (as an existential impulse for alternatives) etc which we shall try address in this work. Lets us examine the background to his philosophical conclusions.

## 2. A Background to Soren Kierkegaard's Life and Philosophy

An examination of the Kierkegaard's background is not for the sake of history in itself but for its fundamental relevance to crystallizing the foundation of Kierkegaard philosophy. The philosophy of Hegel "... the final aim of spirit, the work of providence, lie above the obligation, responsibility, and liability which are incumbent on the individual in regard to his morality"<sup>[5]</sup> Hegel, (1953) is one of the most powerful intellectual influences upon Kierkegaard's own thought. He often referred to it as simply, 'The System.' He was deeply attracted to it at first, but came to be deeply offended by what he took to be its ignorance and disdain for 'a truth which is true *for me*, ... *the idea for which I can live and die*'<sup>[6]</sup> Kierkegaard, (1985). By the time his own writing career began, in 1841, the System's influence was primarily as a peerless example of human arrogance and farce. However, the state-supported Danish Lutheran Church also failed to satisfy Kierkegaard's want of a truth that was true for him. Desperate, going against the philosophical mode and religiously estranged from his father, Kierkegaard's like many people in our world today, commenced a period of rebellious, rakish living in Copenhagen. He found neither liberty nor consolation in this.

Soren Kierkegaard was born on 5th May, 1813, in Copenhagen. He described his frail nature as a heavy weight dragging down a healthy spirit that longed to be free. At seventeen he entered Copenhagen University where he majored in theology on his father's request but he later changed to philosophy. Although his academic studies swayed his thought, the spirit of his writings arouse from

turning points in his life. These were: the two relationships of his life (with his father, Michael Pedersen Kierkegaard and his love affair with Regina Olsen)<sup>[7]</sup> Lawhead, (2002) and two battles (with the press, especially *The Corsair* and the Danish Church).<sup>[8]</sup> (Lawhead, 2002) His health began to fail and he died on November 11th, 1855.

To be very altruistic, contemporary challenges with faith and morals or ethics as well as the questions of individual fulfillment are not different from the exigency surrounding Kierkegaard's life and history. Although many has seen him religiously, however, much of his work deals with the fundamental question of how one lives purposefully committed as a "single individual," thus giving priority to individuality over abstract thinking, objectivity, crowd followership and empty pleasure which are the characteristics of today world shows his deep philosophical ingredient no wonder he is regarded the father of *existentialism*<sup>[9]</sup>. Macquarrie, (1972) Kierkegaard's early work was written under various pseudonyms in Danish but by the turn of the 20th century, his writings were translated into major European languages, such as French and German. He wrote many up building discourses; some of Kierkegaard works includes: "Journals," "Either/Or vol. I&II," "Concluding Unscientific Postscript," "The Sickness unto Death" et cetera

### 3. Kierkegaard's Notion of Human Existence

The concept of human existence has not been handed down as a simple fact, but it has been profoundly discussed through the various epochs of philosophy. It is continuously subjected to rigorous rational analysis allowing it acquire divergent interpretations among philosophers. The question of human existence is the focal point of all Kierkegaard's thought. For Kierkegaard, existing meant becoming more and more individual, but this is not given to all human beings in the same measure, because we may be living in an inauthentic way. The fact that someone belongs to the class of human beings does not guarantee that that person leads a human existence. In fact, Kierkegaard seems to think that few people or at least, a small amount of people genuinely live as human beings. This is evident in our contemporary world.

So, what does Kierkegaard mean by living in a fully human way? In his view, existence is above all something that has to be shaped. People must make themselves if they want to be themselves. "A man cannot evade this self-realization; that would be as impossible as evading one's very self — which is really the same thing, as the self is the same as self-realization".<sup>[10]</sup> Kierkegaard, (1984) The self cannot be itself unless it is creating itself. So, the fact that people have to form themselves means that human existence is a task.<sup>[11]</sup> (María G. Amilburu, *El yo como síntesis segun Kierkegaard*, University of Navarra, 1988) Human existence for Kierkegaard therefore is the

possibility of man's self-realization. Hence he avers that for man to know himself is a cursor or an indicative of his existence and so a thinker who can forget all thinking that he is an existing individual will never explain his life.<sup>[12]</sup> (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy - Søren Kierkegaard) save himself by withdrawing from the responsibility, and forgetfulness of everyday life? Kierkegaard's fundamental insight was the recognition of the concrete ethical and religious demands confronting the individual. He saw that these demands could not be met by a merely intellectual decision but required the subjective commitment of the individual. The necessity and seriousness of these ethical decisions facing man was for Kierkegaard the source of his dread and despair. Consequently this analysis of the human situation, subjectivity, or singularity of existence, commitment etc., has remained the central theme of contemporary existentialism following from Heidegger and Sartre who were the major thinkers after him connected with this movement of understanding human nature towards self-transformation and valuation as this work does for our contemporary world.

In Kierkegaard, the singularity of existence comes to light at the moment of conflict between ethics and religious faith. Suppose it is my sense of doing God's will that makes my life meaningful. How does philosophy conceive this meaning? Drawing here on Hegel as emblematic of the entire tradition, Kierkegaard in his; *Fear and Trembling*, argues that for philosophy my life becomes meaningful when I "raise myself to the universal" by bringing my immediate (natural) desires and inclinations under the moral law, which represents my "telos" or what I ought to be. In doing so I lose my individuality (since the law holds for all) but my actions become meaningful in the sense of understandable, governed by a norm<sup>[13]</sup>. He explains further by noting that a person whose sense of doing the will of God as his/her source of meaning in life will be intelligible just to the extent that his/her action kowtow to the universal dictates of ethics. But the question what if, as in case of Abraham's sacrifice of his son, the action contradicts what ethics demands? is an imperative. Kierkegaard<sup>[14]</sup> (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy-Søren Kierkegaard) believes that Abraham's life is absolutely meaningful (it is not simply a matter of some immediate desire or meaningless tic that overcomes Abraham's ethical consciousness; on the contrary, doing the moral thing is itself in this case his tempting inclination) and this beyond philosophical comprehension, hence she condemns it from an ethical perspective. God's command here cannot be seen as a law that would pertain to all; it addresses Abraham in his singularity. If Abraham's life is meaningful, it represents, from a philosophical point of view, the "paradox" that through faith the "single individual is higher than the universal." Existence as a philosophical problem appears at this point: if there is a dimension to my being that is both meaningful and yet not governed by the rational standard of morality, by what standard is it governed? For unless there is some standard it is idle to speak of "meaning."

The solution to this problem is necessity of an existing norm inherent in singularity itself, and, in his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard<sup>[15]</sup> Kierkegaard (1994) tries to express such a norm in his claim that “subjectivity is the truth,” an idea that prefigures the existential concept of authenticity. Abraham has no objective reason to think that the command he hears comes from God; indeed, based on the content of the command he has every reason, as Kant<sup>[16]</sup> Kant, (1960) pointed out in *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, to think that it *cannot* come from God. His sole justification is what Kierkegaard calls the *passion* of faith. Such faith is, rationally speaking, absurd, a “leap,” so if there is to be any talk of truth here it is a standard that measures not the content of Abraham's act, but the way in which he accomplishes it. To perform the movement of faith “subjectively” is to embrace the paradox as normative for me in spite of its absurdity, rather than to seek an escape from it by means of objective textual exegesis, historical criticism, or some other strategy for translating the singularity of my situation into the universal. Because my reason cannot help here, the normative appropriation is a function of my “inwardness” or passion. In this way I “truly” become what I nominally already am. To say that subjectivity is the truth is to highlight a way of being, then, and not a mode of knowing; truth measures the attitude (“passion”) with which I appropriate, or make my own, an “objective uncertainty” (the voice of God) in a “process of highest inwardness.”

In contrast to the singularity of this movement, for Kierkegaard, stands the crowd: “the crowd is untruth.” The crowd is, roughly, public opinion in the widest sense—the ideas that a given age takes for granted; the ordinary and accepted way of doing things; the complacent attitude that comes from the conformity necessary for social life—and what condemns it to “untruth” in Kierkegaard's eyes is the way that it insinuates itself into an individual's own sense of who she is, relieving her of the burden of being herself: if everyone is a Christian there is no need for me to “become” one. Since it is a measure not of knowing but of being, one can see how Kierkegaard answers those who object that his concept of subjectivity as truth is based on an equivocation: the objective truths of science and history, however well-established, are in themselves matters of indifference; they belong to the crowd. It is not insofar as truth can be established objectively that it takes on meaning, but rather insofar as it is appropriated “passionately” in its very uncertainty. To “exist” is always to be confronted with this question of meaning. The truths that matter to who one is cannot, like Descartes' *morale definitif*, be not that which can be attained when objective science has completed its inquiry. Kierkegaard thus defined truth; “Here is such a definition of truth: An objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth, the highest truth attainable for an existing individual.”<sup>[17]</sup> Kierkegaard, (1941)

Existence therefore, is the attainment of self-possession in the spiritually directed and determined life of the

individual. Substantiating on the aforementioned Kierkegaard crystallizes three basic stages in this process of existence and self-realization and this is important to this research as it aims at self-transformation and valuation in our contemporary world. These stages are: the aesthetic stage, the ethical stage and the religious stage.<sup>[18]</sup> Kierkegaard (1994) a deep reflection will show that in our world today, all human beings are currently at one of these stages, depending on the extent to which they have achieved their life-project. Each stage is a way of seeing life, a way of understanding the world. They are different ways of living out one's existence, independent spheres of life, situations which embody certain amount of stability. Living fully in the aesthetic sphere will never lead to the ethical one, and the upholding of ethics will never open the door to religion. The stages of existence relate to each other like the rungs of a ladder leading to a more perfect existence: and it is impossible to move from one to another without a leap. The transition from one stage to the next means that one has to break with the lower one and this is an all-or-nothing decision, which is not a natural follow-on from the preceding stage, but a complete negation of it. Let us examine them closely

### 3.1. The Aesthetic Stage

This is the first existence-sphere in which a person lives on the level of the senses, impulses and emotions with a sort of childlike intimacy. Life at this stage is a continual search for satisfying moments. The aesthetic category covers a wide range of personality types that includes: raw hedonist who wallows in base, sensual pleasures, as well as the romantic who revels in the enjoyment of art and literature, and even the intellectual who enjoys ideas as though they are fine wines, but without committing his life to any of them.

For the aesthetic person, the only two categories that matter are boring and interesting. Life is a frantic attempt to avoid boredom by filling one's plate with ever-new interesting experiences. Whereas Descartes said, “*cogito ergo sum*,”<sup>[19]</sup> the aesthete says, “I have interesting moments, therefore I am.” For this type of person, “Boredom is the root of all evil.”<sup>[20]</sup> Kierkegaard, (1971) However, boredom has two weapons in its arsenal. First, boredom is a threat because of the transitory nature of all experiences. Just when the aesthetic person thinks his life is full of pleasure, the beautiful flower fades, the concrete comes to an end, or the moment of passion passes and he is left once again with the inner emptiness. The second weapon of boredom is repetition. Too much of any pleasure eventually becomes tiresome, stale, and dissatisfying. To overcome this problem one is driven to a frantic search for new experiences.

To further delineate the aesthetic life, Kierkegaard invents a set of paper allegedly written by an anonymous young man referred to as “A” (pseudonymous author); in the pursuit of interesting moment into a fine art. In a paper titled “*The Rotation Method*,” the character A recommends

that we vary our pleasures the same way a farmer rotates his crops:

One tires of living in the country and moves to the city, one tires of one's native land, and travels abroad; one is *europamude* (tired of Europe), and goes to America and so on; finally one indulges in a sentimental hope of endless journeying from star to star.<sup>[21]</sup> Kierkegaard, (1971)

In other words, the key to life is to keep in control and avoid commitments. Guard against relationship, but maintain a variety of social contacts. Here, marriage is dangerous, for you will lose the freedom and detachment necessary for the aesthetic life; having nothing to gain but everything to lose. However, it is good to spice up your life with a multitude of erotic engagements. Summarily, the aesthetic person avoids responsibilities and makes arbitrariness into an art for an unending amusement.

The problem with the aesthetic person is that he does not have a self, for his choices are determined by his environment, moods, impulses and toes around him/her. Thus there is a natural dialectical tendency to seek more, to seek one's self, a restless urge to find something stable to be committed to. If a person answers this call, he will make the leap into the ethical sage of existence; otherwise he would linger in the aesthetic stage of existence.

### 3.2. *The Ethical Stage*

In this existence-sphere the individual make choices. To exist at this stage does not mean the person suddenly makes all the right moral choices. The dichotomy between this stage and the former is that morality of one's choices is even considered at all. In this stage the world is divided into the dichotomy of good/bad. Although the decision to live in the ethical sphere is not based on reason, once a person decides to be moral he can derive moral principles naturally, just as Kant claimed we could. It is not enough to flip ethical philosophies as though they were coins, instead, one's life should be dominated with ethical concerns.

The paradigm of the ethical stage is found in Socrates and the institution of marriage: where marriage is not a matter of being passively swept up in the passion of love, but making a significant commitment. However, to make a commitment requires some continuity within the individual from moment to moment. Thus, in making significant choices the individual is on the way to becoming a self that endures beyond the immediate moment; choosing who he will be and not just fragmentary impulses that makes up the aesthetic stage, that is, "the possibility of gaining a history."<sup>[22]</sup> Kierkegaard, (1941). The ethical person is characterized by passion: not the whimsical desire of the aesthetic person, but a care about something with all one's being; to embrace the motivating values that one uses consciously to guide one's life.

Even though the ethical person is much further along the way to becoming a self, the goal has not yet been fully attained. Kierkegaard describes a man in this sphere of existence in this way:

Outwardly he is completely "a real man." He is a

university man, husband and father, an uncommonly competent civil functionary even, a respectable father, very gentle to his wife and carefulness itself with respect to his children. And, is he a Christian? Well, yes, he is that too after a sort.<sup>[23]</sup> Kierkegaard, (1968)

Although such a person has obviously gone far beyond the aesthetical stage, his identity is summed up by the series of the universals that clothes him. According to Kierkegaard, the ethical person does not have any relationship with God other than that of good moral conduct. At this stage sin or morale failure is thought of as simply a human weakness that can be overcome through strength of will and a clearer intellectual understanding of the moral good. The ethical person, such as Socrates, has an attitude such as moral self-sufficiency. But the realization of one's own sin or moral failure and inadequacy is the antithesis to the ethical stage. This realization of one's inadequacy rips apart the self-sufficient attitude of the ethical stage and produce despair. Thus, pursuing the ethical stage to its maximum produces a dialectical tension that leads one beyond it. The only escape is through a leap to another stage of existence.

The problem with this stage is that the preceding description could fit any number of people. The question is: Where is the unique, authentic self behind all these descriptions? For these reasons, the ethical person has not achieved the self-fulfillment that is only possible at the religious stage, even though such a person may be a sincere churchgoer. The leap to the religious sphere of existence is therefore an imperative.

### 3.3. *The Religious Stage*

At this stage a person discovers what it means to be a self. It is not an adoption of a set of religious doctrines, but is nothing less than an encounter with the God. The sense of self within the ethical sphere is always measured by the standard of other finite persons, which gives one a limited understanding of selfhood. Only when an individual stands before an infinite God does he obtain a true sense of his authentic self:

But this self acquire a new quality or qualification in the fact that it is the self directly in the sight of God... and what an infinite reality this self acquires by being before God!<sup>[24]</sup> Kierkegaard (1968)

For this reason, Kierkegaard says that "the more conception of God, the more self; the more self, the more the conception of God."<sup>[25]</sup> Kierkegaard (1968) "Here Christianity begins with the doctrine of sin, and therefore with the individual."<sup>[26]</sup> Kierkegaard (1968)

In his book, *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard emphasizes the sharp contrast between the ethical and religious sphere by telling the Old Testament story of Abraham as we mentioned above. However, let us be more specific at this point, in this story, Abraham is instructed by God to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. In deciding what to do, he cannot fall back to universal, ethical norms, for the average person ought to love his children. Thus, he is

caught between obeying the demands of the ethical or serving God. What we must realize is what Kierkegaard calls a "teleological suspension of the ethical."<sup>[27]</sup> Kierkegaard, (1968) That is, his relationship to what is universal must be suspended for the sake of a higher goal, namely his individual relationship to God. Similarly, the person of faith is not related to God by way of morality, but his commitment to morality derives from his relationship to God. The religious person's relationship to anything finite and relative is always governed by his commitment to the absolute God. Kierkegaard compares this with an adult who engages wholeheartedly in a game with children, but who still retains the adult understanding and commitments that transcend those of the child.<sup>[28]</sup> Kierkegaard, (1941)

For Kierkegaard, the three existence-spheres are not like three separate circles that have nothing in common. Instead, they are like three concentric circles with the religious stage and authentic selfhood at the center. One does not live life's pleasures behind, but now realize that they are not absolute but are relative and subordinate to the higher principles within the ethical stage. On realizing the religious stage, he place both life's moment of pleasure as well as ethical principles in the context of his relation with God.

It should be borne in mind that the passing from one to another is not a rational one, but an existential leap with an undetermined nature. Seen in this way, Kierkegaard is actually reiterating Hegel's insight that each advance of the dialectic retains what was of value in the previous stages, but elevates it to a higher level.<sup>[29]</sup> Lawhead, (2002)

#### 4. Critical Analysis of Kierkegaard and the Existentialists

Based on Kierkegaard's notion on human existence, the individual can give full meaning to his existence only if he excludes himself from the crowd and examine himself. Furthermore, base on the freedom of choice he has chosen either aesthetically, ethically or religiously. To what extent should religious instructions supersede moral choices of external justification? An approach to this answers require a recap of the problems of human existence and the existentialists responses

All existentialists have followed Soren Kierkegaard in stressing the importance of passionate individual action in deciding questions of both morality and truth. They have insisted, accordingly, that personal experience and acting on one's own convictions are essential in arriving at the truth. Thus, the understanding of a situation by someone involved in that situation is superior to that of a undetached, objective observer. This emphasis on the perspective of the individual agent has also made existentialists suspicious of systematic reasoning. Many have argued that Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, and other existentialists<sup>[30]</sup> Eiermann, (2011) have been deliberately unsystematic in the exposition of their philosophies, preferring to express

themselves in aphorisms, dialogues, parables, and other literary forms. Despite their anti-rationalist position, however, most of them cannot be said to be irrationalists in the sense of denying all validity to rational thought. The fact is that they only hold that rational clarity is desirable wherever possible, but that the most important questions in life or in human existence are not accessible to reason or science. Furthermore, they have argued that even systems like science is not as rational as is generally seen. Nietzsche, for instance, asserted that the scientific assumption of an orderly universe is for the most part a nothing than useful fiction. This is why Existentialists oppose definitions of the human beings as primarily rational; hence they oppose the schemes of positivism and rationalism. Existentialism asserts that people actually make decisions based on subjective meaning as Kierkegaard emphasized rather than pure rationality. The rejection of reason as the source of meaning is a common theme of existentialist thought, when compared with feelings of anxiety and dread, radical freedom and awareness of death. By and large, Kierkegaard advocated rationality as means to interact with the objective world (e.g. in the natural sciences), but noted that when it comes to existential problems, reason is insufficient put rightly; "Human reason has boundaries".<sup>[31]</sup> Kierkegaard, (1835)

Like Kierkegaard, Sartre saw problems with rationality, calling it a form of "bad faith", an attempt by the self to impose structure on a world of phenomena — "the other" — that is fundamentally irrational and random. According to Sartre, rationality and other forms of bad faith hinder people from finding meaning in freedom. To try to suppress their feelings of anxiety and dread, people confine themselves within everyday experience (that is 'crowd' in Kierkegaard) lost their power to exercise their freedom to choose avoid responsibility and fall in "bad faith" Sartre<sup>(32)</sup> Sartre, (1966) asserts, thereby relinquishing their freedom and acquiescing to being possessed in one form or another by other persons. However, we must bear in mind that Sartre's existentialism drew its immediate inspiration from the work of the German philosopher, Martin Heidegger. Heidegger's 1927 *Being and Time*, which was an inquiry into the "being that we ourselves are" (which he termed "Dasein," rightly put; "*Das 'Wesen' des Daseins liegt in seiner Existenz*," which Macquarrie and Robinson translate, "The 'essence' of *Dasein* lies in its existence" <sup>(33)</sup> (Heidegger 1962:67). "*Dasein*" is a German word for existence), introduced most of the motifs that would characterize later existentialist thinking: the tension between the individual and the "public"; an emphasis on the worldly or "situated" character of human thought and reason; a fascination with liminal experiences of anxiety, death, the "nothing" and nihilism; the rejection of science (and above all, causal explanation) as an adequate framework for understanding human being; and the introduction of "authenticity" as the norm of self-identity, tied to the project of self-definition through freedom, choice, and commitment which Kierkegaard also strongly

emphasized. Nevertheless, the extent to which Heidegger should be considered an existentialist is debatable. Though he repudiated the retrospective labeling of his earlier work as existentialism, it is in that work that the relevant concept of existence finds its first *systematic* philosophical formulation.<sup>[34]</sup> In *Being and Time* he presented a method of rooting philosophical explanations in human existence (*Dasein*) to be analyzed in terms of existential categories (*existentiale*); and this has led many commentators to treat him as an important figure in the existentialist movement.

As Sartre and Merleau-Ponty would later do, Heidegger pursued these issues with the somewhat unlikely resources of Edmund Husserl's phenomenological method. And while not all existential philosophers were influenced by phenomenology (for instance Jaspers and Marcel), the philosophical legacy of existentialism is largely tied to the form it took as an existential version of phenomenology. Husserl's efforts in the first decades of the twentieth century had been directed toward establishing a descriptive science of consciousness, by which he understood not the object of the natural science of psychology but the "transcendental" field of intentionality<sup>[35]</sup>, i.e., a point whereby our experience is *meaningful*, an experience of something *as* something made possible by our ability to bracket every objective knowledge and focus our attention on the object of observation to grasp its essence. This involves self-consciousness, will, choice, and other subjective characteristics. Even though he called eidetic reduction or science<sup>[36]</sup> Omoregbe, (1991), it is in dialogue with Kierkegaard. The existentialists welcomed Husserl's doctrine of intentionality as a refutation of the Cartesian view according to which consciousness relates immediately only to its own representations, ideas, sensations. According to Husserl, consciousness is our direct openness to the world, one that is governed categorially (normatively) rather than causally; that is, intentionality is not a property of the individual mind but the categorial framework in which mind world become *intelligible*.<sup>[37]</sup>

A phenomenology of consciousness, then, explores neither the metaphysical composition nor the causal genesis of things, but the "constitution" of their meaning. This the method Husserl employed to clarify our experience of nature, the socio-cultural world, logic, and mathematics, but Heidegger argued that he had failed to raise the most fundamental question of human nature, especially that of the "meaning of being" as such. In turning phenomenology toward the question of what it means *to be*, such as Kierkegaard sense of commitment, Heidegger insists that the question be raised *concretely*: it is not at first some academic exercise but a burning concern arising from life itself, the question of what it means for *me* to be, a subjective, intentional, authentic question. Existential themes take significantly the fact that the general question of the meaning of being involves first becoming clear about one's own being as an inquirer and is only made possible through self-reflection and commitment as Kierkegaard

showed no wonder his works and that of Friedrich Nietzsche were the influences of Heidegger's philosophy.

From the above we can understand that it is pertinent to note that Kierkegaard's subjectivity is no recently a dialogue in philosophy as one can find anticipations of existential thought from ancient philosophy in Socratic irony and dictum of, "know thyself"<sup>[38]</sup>, Omoregbe, (1990) from medieval in Augustine, from modern Pascal, or the late Schelling, but the roots of the problem of existence in its contemporary significance lie in his work and that of Nietzsche. Although scholars have argued Kierkegaard makes for interesting archetypal contrasts with other important thinkers, both before and after him. For instance if Kant is the archetypal rationalist, Kierkegaard is the archetypal romantic. Just as if Hegel is the archetypal systematician, resolving contradictions, Kierkegaard is the archetypal character who pays attention to details, taking pleasure in paradoxes. And while he shared with the atheist Nietzsche an impression of a harsh world, Kierkegaard thinks that God is the ground and end of the world and of every human longing. For Kierkegaard existence emerges as a philosophical problem in the struggle to think the paradoxical presence of God; for Nietzsche it is found in the reverberations of the phrase "God is dead," in the challenge of nihilism. As noted in Plato Stanford educational entries, "responding in part to the cultural situation in nineteenth-century Europe—historical scholarship continuing to erode fundamentalist readings of the Bible, the growing cultural capital of the natural sciences, and Darwinism in particular—and in part driven by his own investigations into the psychology and history of moral concepts, Nietzsche sought to draw the consequences of the death of God, the collapse of any theistic support for morality"<sup>[39]</sup> (Stanford Encyclopedia of philosophy-Federich Nietzsche). Just like his contemporary, Fyodor Dostoevsky, whose character, Ivan, in *The Brothers Karamazov*<sup>[40]</sup>, famously argues that if God does not exist then everything is permitted, Nietzsche's overriding concern is to find a way to take the measure of human life in the modern world. Unlike Dostoevsky, however, Nietzsche identified that there is complicity between morality and the Christian God that perpetuates a life-denying, and so ultimately nihilistic, stance. De-founding morality from its divine sanction did not begin with Nietzsche as such. Psychological theories of the moral sentiments, since the eighteenth century, provided a purely human account of moral normativity. But while these earlier theories had been offered as *justifications* of the normative force of morality, Nietzsche's idea that behind moral prescriptions lies nothing but "will to power" undermined that authority as it took a step further in emphasis on human inner power. Thus Nietzsche arrived at Kierkegaard's idea that "the crowd is untruth" and engaged in the fight against conforming to the "universal" standards of morality. The normative from his analysis is nothing but the normal, such as Kierkegaard's 'convention', 'public' or 'objective'.

Yet this is not the end of the story for Nietzsche, any more than it was for Kierkegaard. If the autonomous individual has so far signified nothing but herd mentality—if moral norms arose precisely to produce such conformists—the individual nevertheless has the potential to become something else. Nietzsche saw that in the nineteenth century the “highest values” had begun to “devalue themselves.” For instance, the Christian value of truth-telling, and its falling influence on belief in God and morality are situation the individual is forced back upon himself hence he has to take responsibility for meaning, to exercise creativity by “transvaluing” her values and establishing a new “order of rank.” As did Kierkegaard, then, Nietzsche uncovers an aspect of the human being that can be understood neither in terms of immediate drives and inclinations nor in terms of a universal law of behavior, an aspect that is measured not in terms of an objective inventory of *what* I am but in terms of my *way* of being it. Thus, for Nietzsche like Kierkegaard to an extent, existence emerges as a philosophical problem in his distinction between moral autonomy (as obedience to the moral law) and an autonomy “beyond good and evil.” But if one is to speak of autonomy, meaning, and value at all, the mode of being beyond good and evil cannot simply be a lawless state of arbitrary and impulsive behavior. This we must reconcile with Nietzsche. From close observation, neither Kierkegaard nor Nietzsche developed this insight in a fully systematic way. That would be left so to say, to their twentieth-century heirs.

In Germany, the psychologist and philosopher Karl Jaspers who later described existentialism as a “phantom” created by the public<sup>[41]</sup> Jasper, (1957), — called his own thought, heavily influenced by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, *Existenzphilosophie*. For Jaspers, “*Existenz*-philosophy is the way of thought by means of which man seeks to become himself...This way of thought does not cognize objects, but elucidates and makes actual the being of the thinker.”<sup>[42]</sup> Jasper (1968) Jaspers, Heidegger held many philosophical discussions, but later became estranged over Heidegger's support political drive to support Nazism. However, they both shared an admiration for Kierkegaard,<sup>[43]</sup> Jasper (1957)

Various existentialists concept interrelate Kierkegaard and Camus but most prominent are the concepts ‘fideism’ and ‘absurd’. Both Kierkegaard in his writings and Camus *The Myth of Sisyphus*<sup>[44]</sup> Jasper (1854) approached the absurd; they struggled with it. More importantly, Kierkegaard attempted to live with it while Camus attempted to live in spite of it. Both used the tools of their own human and ‘limited’ intellect, and the full strength of their being to live with the knowledge of the paradox of existing in a world that would not yield its meaning. For instance, Kierkegaard’s knight of faith walked the narrow path alone, unsettled by his absolute decision to follow the faint whisper of eternity while Camus’ tragic hero walked up the mountain wondering if it was all for nothing like many do today. Both the knight of faith and the absurd or

tragic hero are baptized in the paradox when they have arrived at the top; when they are closest to omnipresence; when their consciousness bleeds into the absolute and they glance at the overpowering knowledge of the absurd condition of humanity. But neither chooses to stop; the stakes are too high. They have given themselves entirely over to that which they do not fully comprehend. Camus is already in the space of eternity when he imagines Sisyphus there; Kierkegaard does not deny that his goal is eternity in the now. Going beyond their human capacity, and meeting the absolute halfway is an impossible both achieved. Kierkegaard designed the relationship framework based (in part) on how a person reacts to despair. For Camus, suicide is a “confession” that life is not worth living; it is a choice that implicitly declares that life is “too much.” Suicide offers the most basic “way out” of absurdity: the immediate termination of the self and its place in the universe. The absurd encounter is like “leap of faith,” in Kierkegaard's pseudonyms, *Johannes de Silentio* (although the term was not used by Kierkegaard himself)<sup>[45]</sup> Hanny, (1997) where one believes that there is more than the rational life (aesthetic or ethical). To take a “leap of faith,” one must act with the “virtue of the absurd” (as *Johannes de Silentio* put it), where a suspension of the ethical may need to exist. This faith has no expectations, but is a flexible power initiated by recognition of the absurd. (Although at some point, one recognizes or encounters the existence of the Absurd and, in response, actively ignores it.) However, Camus states that because Kierkegaard’s ‘leap of faith’ escapes rationality and defers to abstraction over personal experience, the leap of faith is not absurd. Camus considers the leap of faith as “philosophical suicide,” rejecting both this and physical suicide.<sup>[46]</sup> Kierkegaard, (1991)

Lastly, a person can choose to embrace their own absurd condition. According to Camus, one's freedom and the opportunity to give life meaning is imbedded in the recognition of absurdity. If the absurd experience is truly the realization that the universe is fundamentally devoid of absolutes, then we as individuals are truly free. “To live without appeal,”<sup>[47]</sup> Kierkegaard (1991) as he puts it, is a philosophical move to define absolutes and universals subjectively, rather than objectively (this together puts Kierkegaard and Camus on a plane). The freedom of humans is thus established in a human's natural ability and opportunity to create their own meaning and purpose; to decide (or think) for him or herself. The individual becomes the most precious unit of existence, representing a set of unique ideals that can be characterized as an entire universe in its own right. In acknowledging the absurdity of seeking any inherent meaning, but continuing this search regardless, one can be happy, gradually developing meaning from the search alone and eventually become transformed.

Similarly, the leap of faith that is; Kierkegaard’s conception of how an individual should believe in God, or how a person would act in love is not a rational decision is in touch with Pascal Blasé 1670 *Pensées* (or “thoughts”)

contained his argument on “the Wager.”<sup>[48]</sup> Shouler (2014) The Leap of faith is transcending rationality in favor of faith. God's existence cannot be proved, but proof is not desirable either. What is needed is an exercise of faith, the faith that God exists. Pascal thought it was a reasonable wager to stake everything on God's existence, for there are only two possibilities: “God is or he is not.” The agnostic can argue that since reason is unable to decide the issue, a personally made choice either way is unnecessary. But deciding not to choose is a choice in itself as well. Pascal like Kierkegaard thought that man must wager. Humans must choose. “It is not optional; you are committed to it,” he argues. Men own two things as stakes in such a wager: their reason and their will (blessedness). There are two things to avoid: error and misery. Since reason alone is unable to make the decision, how can the matter be decided? According to Pascal, if God is, then the man who wagers on his existence by believing in him wins everything and loses nothing. Thus, he has set it up that the man who wagers for God's existence risks the possibility of finite loss (if God does not exist) or infinite gain (if God does exist). Therefore, anyone seeking to make an intelligent wager would want the greater reward and wager that God exists. So what Pascal set out to prove was not that God exists but that men ought to believe in God's existence. Pascal strongly affirms the need to transcend the aesthetic and ethical to the religious stage of Kierkegaard if we must be transformed and valued when he averred that the possibility of infinite gain such as a life of eternal blessedness in the afterlife far supersedes any sacrifice of material gain or a “eat, drink, and be merry” lifestyle in our present finite existence.

It is on these bases, that G.W.F. Hegel, Johannes Climacus and Emmanuel Levinas rejected Kierkegaard's notion of existence. Predicating on Kierkegaard's notion of existence, Hegel posits that the individual has no will of his own. Since the concept of conscience is lacking, there is no sense of the possibility of individual forming their own moral judgments about right and wrong.<sup>[49]</sup> Singer (1983) More so, since one's identity, needs and desires are shaped by the society; one cannot think of going out of the community in pursuit of one's interests.<sup>[50]</sup> Singer (1983)

For Climacus, the love relationship between God and human is destined for unhappiness, because it is unequal; and only in equality and in unity is there understanding. So, despite his attempt to assimilate the unknown, it cannot be grasped.<sup>[51]</sup> Climacus (2006). In the same vein, Levinas criticizes the leap of faith by saying that the leap from the ethical to the religious sphere is a type of violence. He pointed to the Judeo-Christian belief, that it was God who first commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac and that an angel commanded Abraham to stop. If Abraham were truly in the religious realm, he would not have listened to the angel's command and should have continued in killing Isaac. To Levinas, “transcending ethics” seems like a loophole to excuse would-be murderers from their crime and thus is unacceptable.<sup>[52]</sup> Levinas (2003)

To a large extent, Kierkegaard has been conceived by many as a religious philosopher but in dialogue with Nietzsche, Dostoyevsky, Pascal or Russell, and, especially, Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus he is quickly extracted from the religious context and approached as a philosopher essentially for two reasons; the *own/self responsibility* emphasis— (all this references integrated to so called “Kierkegaard-Renaissance” as a re-discovery of the *human condition/existence inside the historical crisis* via Oswald Spengler); and the fact that it is a foundation for a step towards self-transformation and valuation in our contemporary world.

## 5. Towards Self-Transformation and Valuation in Our Contemporary World

The re-establishment of the lost fundamental characteristics of self-reflection, commitment and responsibility that gives the human person in every society in the contemporary world, a sense of meaning and purpose, is of great significance to this study. From the foregoing critical engagement on Søren Kierkegaard's notion of human existence or his tripartite life stages as relatively discussed in his works and the significant relevance it makes to our contemporary world is easily identified as it sets a platform for self-transformation and valuation of the human person or better put, an individual. Although his stages of human life can be likened to Hegel's “forms of consciousness” in the *Phenomenology of the Spirit*,<sup>[53]</sup> Stillman (2014) but rather than a logical unfolding of the patterns of culture and history through different existence-sphere, Kierkegaard proposes an individual introspection for an existentially adequate life, as the individual seeks to escape despair by becoming an integrated, authentic self.

In our world today, the hunger for authenticity structures our disposition to explorations of work, relationships, play, and prayer at every stage of our development. We can observe clearly around us that young people try out variety of things or activities such as friends, fashions, hobbies, jobs, lovers, locations, and living arrangements just to find some certain amount of what satisfies or don't satisfies them. Even the Middle-aged people try to deepen their commitments to career, community life, religion, and family that match their self-images, or feel trapped in a crowd following existences. To say the least, our contemporary world showcase older people who out of deep reflection, regard life choices with regret or satisfaction as they try to answer the question; have I been true to myself? As people try to engage in self reflection to arrive at some authenticity and subjectivity against the public, crowd or conventions, increasingly, contemporary culture seems to mock the very idea that there is anything solid and true about the self. Cosmetic surgery, psychopharmaceuticals, and perpetual makeovers unlimitedly shift their focus and readiness to engage in self-

transformation and valuation. MySpace profiles and tell-all blogs carry the whiff of wishful identity. Steroids, stimulants, and doping transform athletic and academic performance. Fabricated memoirs become best-sellers. Speed-dating discounts sincerity. Amid a clutter of counterfeits, the core self is struggling transformation and valuation of itself. "It's some kind of epidemic right now," says Stephen Cope, in his; *Yoga and the Quest for the True Self*. "People feel profoundly like they're not living from who they really are, their authentic self, their deepest possibility in the world. They eventually feel depress"<sup>[54]</sup> Wright (2004)

Ancient Western philosophers have emphasised self-reflection as subjectivity ever since Socrates famous assertion in Athens that the unexamined life is not worth living but left vague exactly what insights and actions such inquiry might yield on the long run. Aristotle later likened self-reflection to acting in accord with the "higher good," which he regarded as the ultimate expression of selfhood. From our discussions so far, it clear that existentialist's emphasis that one's choice of action creates the self such as in Kierkegaard subjectivity as truth, Sartre's, "existence precedes essence." Of course, Heidegger sharply implies not only a high level of reflection, decision and commitment of an individual but also a long history of the study of human existence. Recent contemporary challenges in the world have increased the understanding that our notion of selfhood should be taken further from commitment to the self-acceptance. Whitman writing that, we "contain multitudes." Is an emphasis that selfhood dose not only include that parts of ourselves that we like and understand but also those complex confusing part that we don't. Individuality comes with some discomforts this account for why many people prefer to stay with the crowd which accord them some respect than making that decision accept the truth of who they really are and engage in self-transformation and valuation. "Opening oneself up to an intimate makes one vulnerable to rejection or betrayal,"<sup>[55]</sup> Kernis and Goldman observe in Wright, (2004). In our world today, many feel better to be embraced as an impostor than being cast off for their true nature. This is what many people run away from in our world today. But to acquire Self-transformation and valuation, a high level of self-sincerity from self acceptance is required; this is subjective truth as crystallized by Kierkegaard. It is in fact the reality.

Becoming self-transformed and of value requires making conscious, informed choices based on accurate self-knowledge. Like the existentialists, today's psychologists emphasize the role of active choice in creating an authentic life: a willingness to evaluate nearly everything that you do as unique individuals against a background of conformity, superficiality, exhibitionism, and public. Even with the countless alluring arrays of distractions in our contemporary world such as, from online gambling to video games, television carrying more than 500 channels, multiple conventional ways of viewing concepts, our

conscious consideration is necessitated among alternatives than doing it because it is done that way. Consider someone who in discussion with friends openly saying that he takes tea in the morning "because, well, everybody dose some time, right?" but actually, not everyone do. Again a composer who sets music to blockbuster films complains that they are too commercial, but is unwilling to forego such movies' wide audiences and big paychecks for work on more meaningful projects. In each case, the individual may be guided by unexamined assumptions about what constitutes responsibility, satisfaction, fulfilment, purpose, even success. In order to realize an authentic life and be self-transformed and of value, one often has to set aside hedonic attitude of shallow, short-lived pleasure from, acquiring things and drinking, drug taking, blind following, un-reflected spending, dehumanising and devaluating diversions for eudaimonic attitude to life worthy of yielding a deeper, more meaningful state even though gratification is not always instant..

As did Kierkegaard, Kernis in Wright (2004)<sup>[56]</sup> contends that we each acquire a mixed set of 'shoulds,' 'oughts,' 'allowed' and 'disallowed' and 'have-to's' while still too young to process them. They are neither fully conscious nor deeply considered but are acquired through convention and the expectations of others. Getting beyond these arbitrary strictures often demands the kind of soul-searching that most of us put off or avoid entirely if we must take that step towards self-transformation and valuation in our contemporary world. Hence Jung says the first thing you should do is take a look at those things that are dark in you, the things that are problematical, that you don't like,<sup>[57]</sup> says Thomas Moore in his; *A Life at Work*. "You have to be willing to look at things that don't fit snugly into the image you have of what you would like to be."<sup>[58]</sup> Wright, (2004)

Becoming transformed and valued through authenticity or subjectivity from the above analysis, means pausing and withdrawing from the public, objective, conventional truth, that is 'truth as we see it' to reflect deeply about yourself, identifying and accepting not only contradiction and discomfort about the problematic aspects of our lives, emotions, and behaviours as who you are, but personal faults and failures as well. The fact that if you must do something or become something or go someplace as Kierkegaard emphasised, one must find out how dose who have done, become been or have such things are is true of Kernis' studies which show that in our contemporary world, people with a sense of authenticity are highly realistic about their performance in everything from a game of touch football to managing the family business. They're not defensive or blaming of others when they meet with less success than they wanted. They take responsibility, accept their mistakes and engage in deep self reflection to make sincere personal decision to live above such mistakes and are also committed to their decisions.

In other to transcend to the stages of existence one must withdraw from the crowd because, within the crowd, one is

always looking up to others; as such loses oneself to the way things are done within the established order. According to Kierkegaard, the crowd in every case cannot give authentic meaning to human existence, because the crowd only dilutes the individual and thereby give inauthentic meaning to human nature.<sup>[59]</sup> Stumpf, (2003). This is not to say that he is against human community and group, but only as they are used as sources of evasion. As an implication for self-transformation and valuation, his emphasis is a step towards awakening the consciousness of persons who are lost in the crowd of inauthenticity, objectivity and conventionality of this contemporary fast globalizing world.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, from the discourse thus far, according to Kierkegaard's analysis of human experience, every individual faces the option of choosing between three fundamental kinds of commitments: the aesthetic, ethical and religious. In Kierkegaard's analysis on the importance of individuality and subjectivity, we can easily point out that the leading question "What does it mean to be existing as a human being?" is of utmost importance for understanding the nature of the human person and achieve self transformation and valuation in our contemporary world as it leads out in a number of directions; that there is a pressing question concerning what is right and wrong in our world of moral chaos; There is the daunting issue of what constitutes a meaningful way of life in our world in which all talk of purposes has become obscure; There is a realization that the human concerns and human experience count in our world that has proven to be mostly unknowable. This corresponds to a suspicion of the reductionistic and over-confident ways of science, philosophy, and metaphysics and also expresses continuity with the instincts of literature, poetry, and art. The imperative to "be an individual!" takes on great importance as a way of orienting human life towards self-transformation and valuation in a world described by these other considerations.

More so, Kierkegaard emphasized the importance of choice and this is an indispensable for tool self-transformation and valuation in our contemporary world. Although we see this pre-eminently in Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, but it is perhaps most colorfully expressed by Karl Rahner who described human beings as one giant decision (in his case, for or against God)<sup>[60]</sup>. Wright, (2004). Consequently that we are constituted by our decisions is a fact we must all realize. We cannot appeal to systems of law or convention or tradition as decisively furnishing instructions for life choices in our contemporary world; every choice therefore, has to be personally appropriated. In fact, towards self-transformation and valuation, we must bear in mind strongly that being human sometimes involves decisions that transcend the realm of moral and conventional concerns.

Following from the three stages identified by Kierkegaard, one great question we must always ask ourselves towards achieving self-transformation and valuation in our contemporary world is, "What ought I do?" Kierkegaard's most famous answer to this question turns on his three-fold distinction of stages on life's way. The first stage is the aesthetic, which quite synonymous to the paradigm of our contemporary world where the quest for sensual and intellectual pleasure is high. This eventually leads to boredom and then suicide, however, so there is an impulse to move to a form of life in which there is a conception of 'oughtness'. The second stage is thus the moral in which we freely align ourselves with the moral law, determined to be good. Hegel tried to synthesize the moral life and the aesthetic life but this is actually the highest form of aestheticism. Kierkegaard argued that a jump is involved in moving from one to the other and that we must simply choose. The third stage is the religious in which we must be open to a teleological suspension of the ethical. In the religious life, divine command is paramount and true love for God is expressed in the willingness to set aside moral habits and respond to the divine command.

Whereas Kant took everything, even God, to be consistent with the moral imperative (this is really his definition of rationality), Kierkegaard argued that the divine command is rationally unapproachable; we must just *do it*. The contrast between the moral and religious stages is movingly expressed in the discussion of Abraham and Isaac in *Fear and Trembling*.<sup>[61]</sup> Kierkegaard, (1983) Abraham becomes for Kierkegaard the one whose life of faith (the religious stage) transcends moral categories through obedience to God (even divine whims).

In our contemporary time, we can say that human existence will have meaning if and only if man has a life of purpose, self-transformation and value. In other words, man gives meaning to his existence when he realizes the purpose of what he is created for; the purpose of his existence. To do this, he must exclude himself from the crowd which is un-truth, embrace subjectivity and reflect on his life so as to come to the ultimate truth, a truth predicating on his relationship with his creator, fellow man, the universe and the purpose of his existence.

It is a fact that so much had been said of Kierkegaard's philosophy. However, this analysis of Kierkegaard's notion of human existence becomes relevant as It emphasize the need for self-conscious reflected positive human action in our contemporary world of struggle around fundamental challenges; a world where "but others are doing it", "that is how people do it" is the popular excuse for crimes, exploitation and in fact, so many mistakes; a world where the "crowd" is the epistemic and axiological foundation for actions; a world where authentic or subjective human existence is replaced by objective, public or un-reflected living; a world where people seem to have lost the sense of the sacred, irritated by morals, ignore the call to holiness and misunderstand the content and concept of free choice amidst an immeasurable community life. Like Kierkegaard,

in our contemporary world, self-transformation and valuation through being an individual and exercising all the positive strength as well managing all the negative strength that comes from it have been emphasized in religious or spiritual plane. Although this questions the qualification of what becomes philosophy with regards to Kierkegaard's writing. His argument against objectivity has raised lots of questions since his philosophy is to a large extent based on how to live an authentic Christian life. This is evident when he affirmed that the teleological movement to religious stage establishes a good relationship with God thus crystallizing the truth of Christianity and its practice. But how this so called religious background makes for the transformation of the individual and his valuation in our contemporary world is the key interest of our analysis in this study.

From contemporary observation, the lesson isn't confined to Christian spirituality Kierkegaard work showed since Eastern spiritual traditions have emphasized detachment from the vicissitudes of the mind and emotion that roil human consciousness to embracing self. Buddhism as well takes averred that the self is principal subject of contemplation hence yogic tradition accords self-study or self-reflection great significance. No wonder Hindu Bhagavad Gita suggests strongly that it is our duty to act in other to realize our full potential in the world; it is our duty to act in other to construct or discover a unique individuality, and thereby to live authentically and be self-transformed with deep sense of value. That lesson isn't confined to Eastern spirituality or contemporary religion as the need for humanity to turn to some sets of value worthy of turning the world around is an imperative but this must begin from selves. Reflecting on *The Way of Man*, we recall how Martin Buber relates a Hasidic parable about one Rabbi Zusya, a self-effacing scholar who has a deathbed revelation that he shares with the friends keeping vigil at his side. "In the next life, I shall not be asked: 'Why were you not more like Moses?'" he says. "I shall be asked: 'Why were you not more like Zusya?'"<sup>[62]</sup> Wright (2004)

Kierkegaard's choice of the term "stages" was influenced by Sibbern F.C. and Paul Moller who were his teachers. They used the term "stages" in their lectures on the history of philosophy to designate the level of the power of the mind in Aristotle's psychology. From this, Kierkegaard derived the stage as a paradigm on which he constructed his edifice. Most of Kierkegaard's authorship was written under pseudonyms representing various thinking patterns. The pseudonyms make up his theory of "indirect communication". As noted in several passages in his works and journals, such as *The Point Of View of My Work as an Author*, in order to prevent his works from being treated as a philosophical system with a systematic structure, Kierkegaard in this form. Hence in his; *Point of View*, he noted: "In the pseudonymous works, there is not a single word which is mine. I have no opinion about these works except as a third person, no knowledge of their meaning, except as a reader, not the remotest private

relation to them." He used indirect communication to ensure a difficulty in determining whether he tenaciously held in his works. Kierkegaard would prefer that his readers read his work without any reference to his personality hence he advised that his work should be considered as a dogma or an authority but encouraged self interpretation. Many scholars came in contact with his work, such as Theodor W. Adorno, have strongly refuted Kierkegaard's objective and moved for the consideration of the entire authorship as Kierkegaard's personal and religious views raising lots of confusion and affirmation that Kierkegaard is logically incoherent in his thoughts. However, for the post structuralists, Kierkegaard's intentions should be respected and appreciated as a philosophical ingredient. They interpreted his work by attributing the pseudonymous texts to their respective authors.

Kierkegaard, we can say, is a lover of a deep sense of spirituality and self-consciousness blended with our day to day life. And no doubt, this is a panacea to self-transformation and valuation in our contemporary world.

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