

This is why this debate should not be left for scientists alone. Philosophers should help bring out its implications for our society in particular, and for humanity in general. It is then that the debate will be meaningful.

ON THE LIMITATIONS OF EXISTENTIALISM

Emmanuel Ogundele

For some decades now, the philosophical trend called existentialism has become prominent as well as influential. Existentialism, as a philosophical movement came into reckoning in Europe soon after the end of the Second World War. Historians of philosophy differ concerning the antecedents of this trend of thought. While some would regard Blaise Pascal as the father of existentialism understandably due to his preference for the God of Scripture over the God of the philosophers, others consider Kierkegaard as the founder of existentialism as a result of his approach of not wanting to situate God nor people's relationship with him within a systematic philosophy. Others who have been labeled as existentialists are Friedrich Nietzsche, Dostoevsky, Gabriel Marcel, Karl Jaspers, Martin Buber, Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger, Franz Kafka to mention just a few.

What then is existentialism? Most books on existentialism prefer to describe rather than define existentialism. The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Volumes 3&4 in avoiding to define existentialism says "...That two writers claim to be existentialists does not entail their agreement on any one cardinal point. Consequently, to define existentialism by means of a set of philosophical formulas could be very misleading."¹ This said position is further buttressed by the fact that Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Sartre are considered as existentialists even though Kierkegaard was theist while the other two are avowed atheists. Consequently, while there are differences between the various philosophical positions considered as existentialist, there are some familiar themes occupying the attention of the existentialist movement. Existentialism as a philosophical trend could also be considered as a reaction to certain orientations in philosophy both within the ancient and

¹ Paul Edwards, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1967), p.147.

modern tradition. Allusions have been made in this regard to Plato as well as Hegel.² The revolt against the grand systems set up by these two and others was due to the fact that the individual self or the thinker is lost in abstract universals or in a universal ego. Existentialism has its root therefore in the lack of sensitivity of philosophy to pay the needed attention to individuals in their interiority and externality, as well as the overemphasis on reason and nature in the Enlightenment. It is a protest against the modernist thesis armed with the fact that the traditional philosophy has lost its soul by being removed from life and the existential situation of the individual.

Existentialism has also been described as a "philosophy concerned with describing and diagnosing the human predicament. In this way, it is a re-emphasis of some older ways of thinking."³ This is precisely why it is believed by some not to be characteristically ancient or modern but timeless as a result of its relevance in every age. In relaying his own understanding of existentialism, Paul Tillich, himself an existentialist thinker has this to say:

Existentialism as a universal element in all thinking is the attempt of man to describe his existence and its conflicts, the origin of these conflicts, and the anticipation of overcoming them....Whenever man's predicament is described either theologically or philosophically, either poetically or artistically, there we have existentialist elements.⁴

It is clear from the above that existentialism is a far more extensive and pervasive subject due to the fact that it is present in any situation whereby man's existential issues are raised in any form whatsoever. Of a fact, what is of primary concern to existentialism and existentialists is the human situation and condition in the world. Since it is concerned about the concrete human experience, the tendency may be to move away from adopting the old positions that tend to assimilate the entire individual into

²Harold Titus, Marilyn Smith, Richard Nolan, *Living Issues in Philosophy*, (New York: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1979), p.325.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

some form of universal whole but to rather turn to some other forms of expression like poetry and other literary forms through which the intimate and personal aspects of man may clearly be heard.

The Uniqueness of Existentialism

To discuss some of the unique features of existentialism, it will not be out of place to carry out an exposition and analysis of the thought of a few selected existentialist philosophers. It is intended that their ideas will represent the current of thought called existentialism and, at the same time, bring out its challenges and weaknesses. The challenges are meant to bring us back to ourselves so as not to be lost in absolute universals, while the weaknesses are to call our attention to the fact that existentialism has not answered all the questions that are there for the asking.

For the purpose of this paper, we shall take two existentialists namely Søren Kierkegaard and Jean-Paul Sartre as representing two poles of existentialism. By outlining and analyzing the basic ideas of these thinkers, we hope to bring out, not only the essential content of existentialism but also its diverse dimensions. We shall now take them in this order.

The remarkable Danish thinker, Søren Kierkegaard, was born in 1813 and died in 1855. His was brought up in a pious setting which played a great role in his philosophical development. Kierkegaard's first major contact with traditional philosophy was at the University of Copenhagen. He obviously reacted to Hegelian philosophy which, according to him, was so concerned about abstract thought that it fails to take into account the thinker. Man, in his view has become depersonalized in the process by Hegel's emphasis and glorification of thought and reason. This, in effect means that the thinker and his personal faith and convictions are not taken into account. For Kierkegaard, Christianity is not a rational process and any attempt to make it one is in the wrong direction. It is noteworthy that Kierkegaard's writings like the other existentialists are full of irony and pseudonyms and greatly dictated by his melancholy and personal experiences. It was also said that "the Lutheran orthodoxy under which he was reared and his broken

He however maintains that the primacy of faith is absolutely essential for the realization of what he calls "truth as subjectivity." He defines his concept of truth as "an objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness...this is the highest truth attainable for an existing individual."⁷ Faith is paramount for Kierkegaard but without risk faith is impossible and the greater the risk, the greater the faith. To have true faith, Kierkegaard sued for less emphasis on rationality and more accentuation on inwardness where one comes about an intimate affinity that defies any objective description. Thus Kierkegaard in this sense could be compared to St. Augustine whose emphasis was also on the fact that man should not go out to look for truth for it dwells in the interior of man.

Kierkegaard went further to contrast two ways of life. The first he called the aesthetic and the second ethical. The aesthetic form of life is described as that of a sophisticated and romantic hedonism seeking pleasure which is always insatiable. The enemies of the aesthetic viewpoint are pain and above all boredom. The continuous appetite for novelty that is an attempt to avoid boredom eventually ends at the threshold of despair due to the nature of pleasure.

For Kierkegaard, the ethical is a contrast to the aesthetic. It constitutes the sphere of duty, of unconditional obligations and universal rules. What is special about the ethical is the intensity of the feeling in man, which registers the eternal validity of his being. His definition of the ethical stage is mainly dominated by feeling instead of reason, which is typical of Kant's categorical imperative. A good description of the choice between the aesthetic and the ethical is clearly seen in Kierkegaard's work *Either/Or*. In spite of not wanting to dictate any clear choice between the two, Kierkegaard suggests that the aesthetic fails on its own terms because the man at this stage "has not chosen himself but has rather fallen in love with himself." If the criterion for choosing is not reason but feeling or subjectivity, what it means is that Kierkegaard's theory of choice is highly questionable or even unreliable. He further discussed the transition from the ethical to the religious, an occurrence which takes place when the ethical is forced to its limits. His treatment of this transition is portrayed

⁷Walter Kaufmann, *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, (New York: Meridian Books, 1975), p.117.

engagement undoubtedly were responsible to a great extent for his existential emphasis."⁵

In his writings, *Fear and Trembling*, *The Sickness Unto Death*, and *Either-Or*, he showed clearly that he was concerned about individual existence and what it means to be a Christian. The kind of abstract speculation championed and promoted by Hegel has nothing beneficial to Christianity as a result of its aridity and irresponsiveness to the genuine human longing, hope and aspirations. What bothered Kierkegaard was the disconnection between thought and the thinker. He identified two main enemies of Christianity as the rationalism of the Cartesian or Hegelian sort and convention most especially the conventional Church-goer.

For Kierkegaard, the absence of the thinker from any reflection of his thought was a major vacuum which exposes the sterility of Hegelian rationalism. This is the case about any rational system with this orientation. On the second enemy of Christianity which is convention, Kierkegaard contends that the unreflective Church-member may be a good functionary but does not live his faith. Since his personal dimension is not really involved in Christianity, he has no idea of what it means to be a Christian. What was important for him are not matters of ecclesiastical organization (which he was critical of) but the relationship between the individual and God. He stressed very vigorously the gulf between God and man, as well as God and the world. God, in his view stands above all social and ethical standards. To bridge this gap is not an easy task for it requires experiencing existential anguish as a result of which he must abandon reason and embrace faith. This experience of anguish is very key to the living of a truly human life: "Every man who has not tasted the bitterness of despair has missed the significance of life, however beautiful and joyous his life might be."⁶ What Kierkegaard is saying here has to do with the individual and not the crowd. It is the individual that must experience the bitterness of despair in his individuality. The individual is important in his singularity for he is the only one who can act in the proper sense of the word and not the multitude.

⁵*Ibid.* p. 328.

⁶Søren Kierkegaard, *Either-Or*, trans. David Swenson and Lillian Marvin Swenson, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), II, p.175.

in different ways in his works. In *Either/Or*, the ethical is sometimes put forward as a part of the religious, while in the *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, the religious seems to have absorbed the ethical. Yet in his *Fear and Trembling*, there is a more striking transition from the ethical to the religious. Abraham was used by him here as a typical example. According to Kierkegaard, in demanding from him the sacrifice of his son Isaac, God demanded something which from the standpoint of the ethical is forbidden and in fact a violation of duty. It is simply absurd. Abraham here is required to concur to a suspension of the ethical and make a choice without any criterion and here universal rules are helpless. Some experiences may help as a guide here, such as the experience of despair and that of generalized fear and anxiety. These points were made by him in his books, *Sickness Unto Death* and *The Concept of the Dread*. While Despair and Dread forces the individual to realize that what confronts the him is the void, in the state of despair, he is reminded that what he despairs about are not contingent facts such that he claims to be the objects of his own despair, as such, but of himself. It is seen in confronting an emptiness that cannot be filled by aesthetic pleasure or ethical obligations.

In relation to human existence and ethical commitment, Kierkegaard extensively discussed Christianity which he saw as being higher than the religions of the Greeks and the Jews. To be a Christian is to subordinate one's reason to the authority of revelation that is given in paradoxical form. For instance, the idea that God to become a teacher of man should appear in human form is an impossible paradox which reason cannot comprehend in its own categories. According to Kierkegaard, the Christian lives before God by faith alone and his awareness of God is the awareness of his infinite distance from God.

In all, Kierkegaard's point is clear, Christianity should not be made to depend on any argument and so skeptical objections to Christianity are not in reality grounded on intellectual doubt but arise from insubordination, unwillingness to obey and rebellion against authority. The second existentialist we shall consider is Jean-Paul Sartre.

An outright rejection of Kierkegaard's ideas, especially of his notion of irrational Christianity, is found in the writings of the French philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, who also contributed immensely to the

development of contemporary existentialism. The bulk of his ideas are found in his works *Nausea* (1930) and *Being and Nothingness* (1943). According to Sartre, we find ourselves "trapped into existence" in a world which, whether we like it or not does not make any sense at all. We, as it were, divide the world into what is *pour soi* (for the self) and *en soi* (in itself). The *en soi* is the objective characteristics of objects and not really what concerns us. But the *pour soi* which has to do with how we are affected by objects is crucial to us. Man is a *for-itself* and not an *in-itself*. This means that he is a project, one who is able to project himself to different goals and values. His existence is always characterized by a form of restless movement whereby his nature is essentially determined by his wanting to be something he is not. For the completion or accomplishment of one goal, man naturally requires another. Hence his restlessness is endemic, and so he is always in a passage. Since he defines himself in anxiety or what he calls *Angst*, the anxiety is a permanent state too. Man, for Sartre, is therefore fundamentally characterized by anxiety as he is condemned to freedom. In this wise, existence according to Sartre precedes essence.⁸ In this concept of freedom, you sense a type of fatality, one to which man is helplessly abandoned. In trying to avoid this fairly negative perception, Sartre sets out his own version of freedom thus insisting that freedom is a "transcending and nihilating of being rather than an aspect of being in that even after achieving a project, he is not identical with the project actualized."⁹

In Sartre's view, the characterization of man's life by freedom means that he is always able to choose among many alternatives in satisfying a given goal. The consequence of this is that psychological determinism is indefensible since man is responsible for his choice. This was what he meant by saying that man is "condemned to freedom." Freedom is also considered by Sartre as a reality that does not give man any rest whatsoever as he cannot become a thing in the world except in

⁸ J. P. Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p. 515. To say that the *pour-soi* has to be what it is, to say that it is not in not being what it is, to say one and the same thing.... I am condemned to exist for ever, apart from my essence, apart from the springs and motives of my acting. I am condemned to be free."

⁹ David Roberts, *Existentialism and Religious Belief*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 210.

death. He brands freedom as arbitrary because in consciousness "I am separated from the world and from my own presence, and so how I am related to the world cannot be automatic." I must therefore take up attitudes toward both. For him, to be conscious and to choose are one and the same. In Sartre's view, since my mode of choosing is arbitrary, I cannot demonstrate the rightness of my values and world-view by showing the way they conform to norms, structures, or authorities beyond my freedom.

The position of Sartre dictates the tune of his entire philosophy especially his emphasis on the fact that there is no non-human origin and we are what we make ourselves to be. In other words, there is nothing that transcends man. Consequently, reaching "Being itself", which Heidegger accused western metaphysics of failing to do, is not only unattainable but superfluous. Understanding the relationship between consciousness and man is the only task that has to be done and once this has taken place, the ontological task has been completed. The non-human in Sartre's understanding is utterly meaningless.

Conclusion

It is good to realize that even though the two existentialists considered and used different approaches and are from different backgrounds, the common object of their study is man. The complexity of man dictates the enormity of their task and the seriousness of their conclusions. Any honest account of man must take into consideration his being and all the consequences resulting from the reality of this being. The tendency is always there to gloat over our rationality to the forgetfulness of other aspects of our humanity. One of the primary accomplishments of existentialism is to call our attention to the areas that have been hitherto neglected by mainline philosophy. What is therefore lacking in existentialism is the focus on man in his subjectivity to the detriment of man in his externality. The subjective aspect of man has an important role to play in his interior relations. It is the core of man, the seat and depth of

his being. A great emphasis on this was prominent in the works of Augustine and Descartes. Augustine has held that man should not go out to the exterior to look for truth because it dwells in the interior. Descartes' "cogito ergo sum" is a clarion call to man to be conscious of his interior self from where he will come to the awareness of the fact that he exists.

In Kierkegaard, we see a return to the reformulation of the old understanding in a new form. While his invitation to a new interiority or subjectivity will help man to realize himself more, it is doubtful whether this is sufficient. Here the Thomistic position will be helpful, for just as man has his interior dimension, he has an exterior part as well. This exterior part, which, according to Descartes, is extended has a lot to contribute in the "holistic" understanding of man. In the first place, it is that point at which man is able to relate to other beings, his window to the world as it were. To conceive of man as the "window-less" monads of Leibniz is not helpful if we are to have an adequate understanding of man.

Jean-Paul Sartre saw man from a rather limited point of view. His consideration of man as an entity who is utterly subject to the cruel hands of fate is neither realistic nor acceptable. Man is far more than a being "trapped in existence" and "condemned to freedom". He is a being whose reality is affected by many conditions primary among which is the will to do good. The fatalist conception of man by Sartre will not do justice to the existence of man who is a dynamic being, acting with a purpose and toward a goal. Man is therefore not a brute being but one who is conditioned and affected by the totality of his experience and other realities in the world. He is not a being left alone to himself, but a communitarian being. The social nature of man means that man cannot do without his exterior relations nor live a happy life without his interaction with others.

Thus, apart from defining man in terms of his interior being, he must be seen from the perspective of his social and external relations. There is in fact a way in which the community defines man since one cannot be in the river and refuse to be touched by water. Man, as man, is incomplete without his interiority and communitarian dimension. It is this that makes the total man and the beginning of a better appreciation of his being. Existentialism will be more realistic if it could consider man holistically by examining man as a being who cannot thrive well except in

the community. According to a saying "man is only man in context of a community, apart from it, it is either an angel or a god." While one would slightly disagree with the exaggeration here, one could not agree less with the fact that the community is important for man. However, what makes the complete man is the combination of his interior and external life.

From the foregoing, it must be said that while existentialism in reaction to modernism has set a new paradigm for understanding man, it is contestable if its thesis can reach the desired objective: explaining the entity called man. While it struck the right cord by hammering on what is missed out by the modernist thesis, it left out an all-important aspect of him, which is the perspective that man is a being who has not only an interior life, but also an external life.

HEALTH AND HEALING IN THE BOOK OF TOBIT AND THE HEALING MINISTRY TODAY

Francis Adesina

The fascinating story narrated in the book of Tobit, like a well fashioned fairy-tale, captures the attention of its readers as it unfolds, introducing an angel and a demon, a magical fish and a faithful dog, a journey and a lady in total distress. As one enjoys the creative mind of the story-teller, one cannot but get in touch with his profound messages. One of the concerns that feature prominently in the story is the concern for the value of family life and its affiliate exigencies. Alexander A. Di Lella puts it better, when he states that the book of Tobit "features the value of family life and religious fidelity as well as the perennial concerns for health and healing."¹ We may remark here that, although the book of Tobit is not so much cited in the New Testament, its theology and messages are relevant to the composition of many New Testament writings.

The focus of this essay is to highlight the concern for health, wholeness and healing in the book of Tobit. Although this is not the primary intention of the author, it is a major theme developed by him as he endeavors to illustrate and convince his second century readers how faithful people can live according to the Law of Yahweh outside their homeland. While focusing on his main theme, the author of Tobit betrays his interest on issues of health, healing and human wholeness. He allows this secondary theme to develop in his composition and to span through the length and breadth of the narrative. Our interest in Tobit's concern for health, healing and wholeness is premised on the fact that the book provides an opportunity to search for the authentic roots of the phenomenon of healing in the biblical traditions beginning from the Old Testament to the New Testament; so that, we may be able to draw from

¹ Alexander A. Di Lella, "Health and Healing in Tobit" *The Bible Today*, Vol. 37, Nm. 3, (March/April 1999), p. 69.