

SOREN KIERKEGAARD AND THE CHALLENGES OF HUMAN EXISTENCE IN AFRICA

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Abstract

Philosophers of different generations have been interested in how to impact humanity positively. This is because the primary responsibility of philosophy is to reflect on life and society. The advent of the existentialist tradition transformed the philosophy of human existence into a specialized field in the philosophical discipline. Soren Kierkegaard, as an essential part of this tradition, concerned himself with concrete issues of human existence. They are Issues that should assist the individual to attain self-realization and actualization. Ironically, the African continent is seen as a paradox of poverty, dehumanization, and low human existence amid abundant human and natural resources. These plethoras of issues have a more significant effect on human existence among societies of the Global South against myriads of opportunities and regard for human life, which abound among communities of the Global North. Africa is still far from achieving some of the issues necessary for the attainment of the real- self as envisaged by Kierkegaard. The thrust of this paper is to examine the discourse of human existence from Soren Kierkegaard's point of view, with the hope that human existence on the continent could be improved by the maximization of the various existential virtues in African culture and philosophy. The work is a comparative analysis of Kierkegaard and African philosophies to isolate issues

in Kierkegaard's philosophy that can spur Africans' attempt to institute qualitative human existence among her people.

Introduction

Existentialism is an important nineteenth-century philosophical ideology that can be applied to many fields of study. It applies to some specific works of certain philosophers of the late 19th century and the early twentieth century. These scholars may be different in their approaches and methodology. However, they are united in the agreement that human action, and not mere thinking, should be the background of philosophy. Some of these scholars include: Soren Kierkegaard, Simon de Beauvoir, Maurice Merleau Ponty, Albert Camus, Martin Heidegger, Friedrich Nietzsche and Jean Paul Sartre. However, Kierkegaard played a great role in the formation of what is today known as existentialism. He is seen by many as the original mind of this field of philosophy and his philosophy is concerned with concrete issues of human existence.

Existentialism is primarily concerned with the nature of human existence. It focuses is on how humans can get the best out of existence. Also, it is a field that takes the individual's existence as the starting point of philosophy. For them, it is only when individuals have a good life that society can be at peace. It is, however, pathetic that the narratives of human existence in Africa are the opposite of what existentialism is all about. Africa still struggles with issues of a high rate of poverty, unemployment, environmental degradation, corrupt leadership, collapsed infrastructural facilities, and other issues that negatively impact qualitative human existence. What then is the hope for humanity in Africa? How can life be made more conducive for Africans?

It is based on the above treatise, that this paper seeks an African understanding of Kierkegaard's existentialism to isolate crucial issues of his philosophy that are germane to human development in Africa. A major fact that cannot be ignored is that most of what we have today as existentialism, are products of Western ways of thinking. The need, therefore, to contextualize Kierkegaard's philosophy into the African situation for a better understanding of the human condition, can be made better on the continent.

The word ‘challenge’ is used to mean a difficult task intended to spur positive and practical actions to overcome a terrible situation. The difficult task here is how to overcome the present narration of a below-quality human existence in Africa. This work avers that Kierkegaard’s existentialism can be applied to instigate Africans to positive actions to improve the quality of human existence within the continent. Therefore, the heart of this work is an African interpretation of Kierkegaard’s individual, moral, religious, and subjective existential philosophy and its implications for human existence in Africa.

II. Kierkegaard’s Philosophy

Soren Kierkegaard was an accomplished and profound writer in the Danish age of intellectual and artistic history. The influence of his works cut across the boundaries of philosophy, theology, psychology, literary criticism, devotional literature, and fiction. His philosophical contributions are also a mixture of social critique and Christian apologetics.¹ His philosophy of human existence covers different areas of thought and arguably no other existentialist has the coverage of different areas of human existence like he did.

He treated the term ‘existence’ as a word uniquely reserved for man. It is only humans that can exist and not animals or other things. To exist is to be a certain kind of individual who strives, considers choices, decides, and commits himself to his choice and decision². This implies that philosophy must take into account the fundamentals of the human condition. Additionally, an existing individual must be the one who commits himself to some course of action that defines his existence as opposed to someone else’s existence.³ An existing individual is unique from others and is not in a passive state, but rather has an active engagement with the world and his/her life. Let us now consider a few issues in Kierkegaard’s philosophy.

A. The individual in the Philosophy of Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard’s philosophy of human existence is centred on the individual. The term existence is treated as a word uniquely reserved for an individual human being. The individual to him has been lost to contemporary philosophy and culture and there was the need to retrieve him. This is because contemporary

philosophy has rated reason above man. The individual should be treated in a manner that allows him to make choices, take decisions and also commit himself to the outcome of his decisions.⁴ The individual, as a result, must not be under any form of bondage including the bondage of philosophy and society. Upon this rests the understanding of his concept of freedom.

He conceives freedom as a fundamental right of the individual. The individual needs to be free without any form of restraint. Freedom, to him, is the basic condition of human existence. Trying to prove that man is free is like trying to prove that man exists. Man does not acquire freedom because it is identical to human existence. Freedom is, however, tied to choice. Choice is the concrete actualization of freedom. The individual must not be restrained in any form to freely choose who and what he or she becomes. Freedom, however, compels man to assume responsibility for his life.⁵ As a theistic existentialist, Kierkegaard emphasizes the freedom of the individual and the personal responsibility of the individual before God. He posits that the existence of a moral system given to us by God in no way limits our freedom and responsibility. God requires man to be free through the choices he makes and he honors those choices.⁶

His idea of an existing individual is one who is active and not passive. He differentiates between the *Spectator* and the *Actor*. To him, only the *Actor* can be said to exist because human existence is action-oriented. Hence, while both the *spectator* and the *actor* exist in a sense, only the *actor* truly exists.⁷

Generally, Kierkegaard emphasizes the individual over the “numeric masses.” He maintains that God has no relation to mankind as a whole. The individual is more important than the universe.⁸ For him, truth is located in the individual and not the crowd. His emphasis on the individual against the society made the state Lutheran Church of Denmark to come against him and persecute him. Of a truth, individualism is key to the making of Africa regarding the creation of an ideal society, since individuals make up the society.

Another issue germane to Kierkegaard’s view of the individual human existence is that of individual self-actualization. This is a general theme found in the writings of most existential philosophers. It is this same point that Martin Heidegger refers to

as the *Authentic Existence*. Someone can be said to live a life of *self-actualization* or *Authentic Existence* only when the individual realizes his uniqueness and comes to terms with the fact that each human being is a distinctive entity. It is important for a human being to realize that he has his destiny to fulfill so as not to follow the crowd and be unnecessarily influenced.⁹

B. Human Existence And Religion

As an Existentialist, theologian, and philosopher, Kierkegaard places heavy emphasis on God as regards human existence. His religion is Christianity and it encourages individuals to enter into a faith relationship with God through Jesus Christ. It is clear from his philosophy that no meaningful existence is possible outside God. His idea of an existential individual is, therefore, coloured largely by his belief in God. Africans also hold much belief in God as the creator of the universe and ascribe much respect to Him, in fact, God in the African setting is seen as the all-knowing one.

Faith to Kierkegaard involves individual subjective passion and not the regurgitation of church dogma. It requires personal involvement that the clergy or any other religious leader cannot mediate.¹⁰ Relationship between man and God is personal and subjective. An attempt to use reason to analyze such a relationship is to miss the essence of religion. Faith is important because it is only through it that the individual can achieve true self. In essence, true self-actualization is not possible outside God.

Religion to him is not characterized by objective truth, but subjective truth (passion & commitment). Religion is made meaningful and relevant by a passionate commitment to what we believe and what we want out of life, regardless of whether it can be rationally and mathematically described. Reason undermines faith and can never justify it. To believe in God is a matter of choice and not an intellectual exercise.¹¹ In fact, the Christian faith embodies some paradoxes that are offensive to reason. Faith to him is the individual reaction to the inherent paradoxes of Christianity. The central paradox is the assertion that the eternal, infinite, transcendent God simultaneously became incarnated as a temporal finite human being.¹² There are only two possible attitudes in response to his paradoxical assertions. It is either to have faith or take *offense*. What is not allowed is to believe with the

aid of reason. The choice of faith requires the suspension of reason in order to believe in a virtue higher than reason. Kierkegaard, in this regard, took his religion to the extreme as his idea of suspension of reason in matters of religion, is not consistent with the basic tenet of philosophy and also not productive for religious practitioners. Suspension of reason in matters of religion will expose practitioners to falsehood, deceit, and manipulation as we have today in the name of religion.

C. Kierkegaard's Ethics

Ethics is an essential part of Kierkegaard's theory of existence. This is captured in his three levels of existence thus: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. However, individual self-fulfillment is only obtainable at the religious stage, which is the highest moral stage for the individual. It is the level of revealed morality and is made possible by a leap of faith¹³. The three stages are not one that the individual passes through in sequence, but rather as paradigms of existence.

The Aesthetic stage is a stage of no morality. At this stage, a man drifts from pleasure to pleasure. The individual is not only being ruled by erotic sensations but also governed by his senses. A person at this stage is less concerned with any universal moral standard. His chief motivation is a desire to enjoy the widest variety of pleasures of the senses. He expresses displeasure at anything that would limit his absolute freedom.¹⁴ This stage is driven by individual happiness and not the need to conform with any morality. However, Kierkegaard believes that morality is important in the process of the individual becoming his essential self.

The ethical stage on the other hand is a stage of individual moral consciousness. The ethical man recognizes and accepts the rules of conduct that reason formulates. He accepts the limitations upon his life that moral responsibility imposes.¹⁵ He accepts his role as a moral actor and consciously makes efforts to fulfill moral obligations. The ethical man will act following moral obligations, even when such decisions bring displeasure. Hence, the focus of the ethical life is not pleasure, it is on doing the good.¹⁶ Man, however, comes to realize later that he is not capable of fulfilling the moral law, which he finds himself violating deliberately. This

consciousness makes him develop a sense of guilt. Man to Kierkegaard is very limited in conforming to moral laws.

This necessarily leads man to the stage of *Revealed Morality*, also known as the ‘Religious state’. It is a sphere of life where the individual realizes that the ethical life is not sufficient to actualize one’s existence and come into a relationship with God. There is something higher than universal duty and Kierkegaard calls it “*the Absolute*.” At this stage, the individual tries to confront his awareness of guilt, strives to be a fully actualized person through a personal relationship with God, and also faces the reality of the existence of God and the awareness of his self-alienation.¹⁷ It is the stage where the individual submits his weakness and limitations to God. *Revealed morality* is rated above universal or societal morality in the idea of Kierkegaard.

D. Subjective Truth

Another very important issue in Kierkegaard’s existentialism is the subjectivity of truth and knowledge. By this, he means that truth and knowledge must relate to human emotion and passion. Only subjective truths are existential and concrete truth. This is because they speak to the practical needs of man. Religious truth, for example, is both practical and emotional. As a result, scientific truth and knowledge have no place in his philosophy. His slogan is the truth is subjective and “subjectivity is truth.”¹⁸

Objective truths are mere abstraction and they transform existence into something indifferent and vanishing¹⁹. They are the truths that can be abstracted from reality, conceptualized, and tested. For example, the truths of science, mathematics, and history are in this category. Objective truth focuses on the concept, but subjective truth focuses on the individual. The latter is, therefore, essential than the former. Kierkegaard’s subjective thesis is that all knowledge that does not relate itself to exist in the reflection of inwardness, is inessential and mere objective knowledge.²⁰ Every knowledge must be personally appropriated.

III. African Understanding of Kierkegaard's Existential Philosophy

This section of the paper tries to attempt an African interrogation of the key existential issues from Kierkegaard's philosophy that have been discussed. Here, we will isolate major subject matters in the discourse of the African concept of human existence and relate them with Kierkegaard's existentialism. Since it is difficult to separate the African worldview from her philosophy of existence, the two expressions will be used interchangeably. African worldview like many others is a product of "a long process of reflection and speculation on the human condition"²¹. The task here is a reflection on the experience of African people and of their world which has become their philosophy of existence. This we will discuss under the following headings; God, society, morality, and subjectivity.

A. God

The place of God in human existence is an area that Kierkegaard and African people are united in their philosophy. To Kierkegaard, a close relationship with God is crucial to human existence and this is where he stands out from many other existentialists. Existentialists like Sartre, Nietzsche, and Heidegger played down the role of God in human existence, but Kierkegaard sees it as germane to life. In the same vein, human existence in Africa cannot be detached from God. God to Africans, is the sustenance and the reason behind human existence. The spiritual or the religious dimension takes pre-eminence in an African's discussion about man and his existence.²²

Kierkegaard's concept of God as regards man is similar to that of the Africans in some regards. First is the need for man to commit himself to God through faith. Faith in God is also an important part of religion in Africa. God in Africa is worshipped through divinities and ancestors and they have faith in Him that He will meet their existential needs. The main difference between Kierkegaard and Africans is that Jesus Christ is the former's channel of faith while divinities and ancestors are the latter's channel of faith. Kierkegaard's religion is Christianity while African religions are indigenous to the people.

In addition, Kierkegaard's admonition that individual passion and commitment are essential parts of the human relationship with God is similar to how Africans perceive their relationship with God. African passionate commitment to God is reflected in their sacrifices, desire to please God with good character (Iwa Omoluabi), and the way they conduct worship. Worship of God and personal emotional commitment are inseparable in the African concept of religion. God is never subjected to human reason among the people of Africa. Human reason in fact cannot comprehend God sufficiently. Religion is, therefore, more subjective in Africa.

In the philosophy of Kierkegaard, fulfilling the essential self or authentic existence is not possible outside God. In the same vein, good human existence cannot be detached from God in Africa. God is the reason behind human existence. The spiritual dimension takes preeminence in Africans' discussion about man and his existence.²³ Man cannot be the beginning point when we discuss his existence, since he did not bring himself into existence.

B. Individual versus the Society

Kierkegaard's philosophy rates the individual above the society. Human existence to him is for the individual and not the crowd. His philosophical theology is largely individual-centered; an individual that must be unique, active, religious, and responsible. These are important for individual self-actualization and satisfaction. Though his philosophy recognizes the presence of society, such recognition must not impede individual freedom and the desire to achieve the essential self.

This philosophy is, however, antithetic to societal preservation and this is where the African view of human existence proffers a better solution. The society or the "numeric masses" has a more important part to play in the life of an individual than Kierkegaard envisaged. Hence, human existence in Africa is highly social and emphasizes individual responsibility. As a result, freedom in Africa is not absolute and unfettered. Individual responsibility in Africa includes the effort to ensure others act according to acceptable standards and values. This is why the culture of the people of Africa emphasizes moral training. No man should

choose for himself without consideration of the implication of such choice to others.

The concept of *Ubuntu* from South and East Africa vividly describes the value of society on human existence. The concept shows how the being of an African person is not only embedded in the community but the universe as a whole. It is used in a more philosophical sense to mean the belief in a universal bond of sharing, that which connects all humanity. With *Ubuntu*, a member of a family or a village who is in great existential need will not be abandoned. *Ubuntu* demands that high value be placed on human life, reject vengeance, place a high premium on dignity, compassion, and humanness. It also dictates a shift from confrontation to mediation, dictates good character, and favours restorative justice.²⁴ The communal individuality of the *Igbos* is also expressed in proverbs such as, "Ngwere gharanu Kwuosisi aka akparaya"²⁵ (if a Lizard stays off the tree, it would stray into danger). This expresses the indisputable and inheritable presence of the community to which the individual belongs. Individuals make up society.

C. Ethics

Ethics is important in the existentialism of Kierkegaard and that of Africans. The two philosophies share some things in common in this regard. First, morality is crucial to good human existence. Second, morality is God's centered. God is higher than moral law and greater than any set of values. In addition, morality is communal in both philosophies. That is the need for the individual to follow universal and societal rules.

However, morality is deeper in the African discourse of human existence than in Kierkegaard's existentialism. Morality is the foundation of good human existence since it regulates social relations among people. Adherence to moral rules provides answers to complex questions of human existence. The moral order is the foundation of desirable social order in many African cultures. It can be said that the drop in the African moral system is a major reason why Africa is presently in a pitiable existential condition. Social crises like corruption, insecurity, war, child labour, bad leadership, and many more are products of the loss of the moral system.

Sequel to the above, the African moral foundation is dictated by good character. The essence of good character in the attainment of qualitative individual existence is best captured in *Iwa*, the Yoruba concept of character. The people believe that a person's character is capable of changing his destiny and also the quality of his existence. Good character is capable of bringing fortunes to a man according to Africa tradition. A person whose character is bad cannot have a desirable existence. Idowu on this basis asserted that a good destiny unsupported by good character is worthless.²⁶

The importance of character in the Yoruba worldview is also explained by the concept of *Omoluabi*. An ethical-cultural and existential interpretation of this concept present it as a virtue needed for individual happiness and the improvement of the human condition. This is in agreement with Aristotle that virtues are qualities that are necessary for the development of man as a social being.²⁷ It is generally used to describe someone of good and virtuous character.

The existential value of *Omoluabi* can further be seen in the way scholars describe a person that possesses it. An *Omoluabi* is a person that is well nurtured, lives by precepts of the education he has received,²⁸ Person of good knowledge, wisdom, self-discipline, cultured with a sense of responsibility and integrity.²⁹ Other features include: respect, truth, bravery, goodwill, intelligence, hard work, well-spoken word,³⁰ self-conscious, rational, has intellectual intuition, possesses the power of will, affection, preservation, and analytical judgment.³¹ From the above, it is obvious that the qualities of *Omoluabi* are essential for good individuals and general human existence.

4. Challenge for Human Existence in Africa

We have considered the major contents of Kierkegaard's Philosophy which also represents Western existentialism. We have also x-rayed some crucial issues in African existentialism. The purpose is to place the paper on a strong interpretative foundation. Our task in this section of the paper is to discuss ways in which Kierkegaard's Philosophy challenges African existentialism for qualitative human existence.

This is meant to spur or instigate Africa's desire to overcome obstacles to human development and existence. African leaders, philosophers, and citizens surely have roles to play in turning the tide of human existence. It may be a difficult task, but African existential problems are surmountable since they are human problems. They need, therefore, to consider what Africans can learn from Western Philosophy in their efforts to have qualitative and functional existence. Therefore, Kierkegaard's existentialism challenges Africans in the following ways:

1. The Challenge of Intentional Positive and Practical Actions

Existentialism has generally been described in this paper as a theory of action. There is a need, therefore, for Africans to be intentionally committed to positive and practical actions that can lift the continent out of its pitiable narrative of human existence. These include the formulation of educational, political, social, and legal policies that can drive the desire of the people for a better human condition. This may also require some structural changes. Africans must not be scared of the changes that are germane to good human existence. Enough of paying lip service to development and growth. Our actions must match our intention.

Here, three adjectives are crucial in making actions match the intention. First, Africa must be **intentional** about the plan to change the narrative of human existence. The change we are talking about cannot come by chance, luck, or coincidence. Second, the intentions must be **positive**. Positive in the sense of considering the general interest of the people, rather than the parochial and self-centered interests of a few people. They must also be actions that will bring about positive changes in the lives of the people. Lastly, the intention and actions to arrive at our existential destination must be **practical**. Enough of theories and paradigms that cannot be translated into practical human experience. Formulated policies must be achievable with timelines. African has stayed on the mountain of human stagnation for too long.

2. The Challenge of Balance between the Rational and the Emotional Aspects of Life

For African existentialism to be productive and positively impact the people, there must be a balanced measure of reason and emotion. It is of no value to over-emphasize reason above emotion because humans are naturally emotional. The emotional aspect is also important to good human existence. However, it is unproductive to overstretch the need for emotional consideration over reason.

Kierkegaard in his philosophy played down the role of reason and overstretched the subjective aspects of human life. Similarly, many African cultures tend to overrate the emotional aspect of life over reason. This is because of the social and relational tendencies in African culture.

Reason is an important aspect of philosophy and its benefits are enormous. Suspension of reason in religion, as Kierkegaard advocates, is dangerous to the practitioners because it opens them to falsehood, deceit, and manipulation. Reason is an important instrument for human development. No society can achieve maximum growth by suspending reason for the emotional aspect of life, since reason is the ability of the human mind to think, understand and form a judgment by process of logic. Africans need the rational faculty to overcome her numerous challenges. To think about them, put them in perspective, and form a sound judgment about how to deal with them.

In the same vein, African Philosophy must address both the objective and the subjective needs of man. As African Philosophy upholds the emotional and relational principles of human existence, it must seek a balance between it and the rational principles. Knowledge is indispensable to qualitative existence and reason is an important part of knowledge. Reason is important to the discovery of new ideas, understanding of man and his environment, and used in changing a course of event. Reason is an important part of Philosophy and by extension human endeavour.

3. The Challenge of Realizing the Essential-self

Essential self to Kierkegaard is the ability of the individual to be free for himself and before God and without any restriction. Freedom in this regard must be unfettered and unrestrained. This

is germane to self-actualization because, through it, the individual can exhibit his uniqueness. The essential self is sometimes referred to as the real self and according to Sartre, the authentic self.

The above raises some issues about the freedom of the individual in Africa. There are cultural, political, and legal impediments to individual freedom in many parts of Africa. Culturally, the practice of widowhood in some African cultures limits the freedom of widows to realize the essential self. Politically, democratic values are tampered with to the extent that individual political freedom is negatively affected. Rule of law, for example, has not been enshrined in the political and legal systems of many African countries. Countries that have such provisions in their laws are only paying lip service to its implementation. People are disenfranchised during elections and elections are not free, fair, and credible in many instances. The Judiciary is no longer the hope and protector of the common man as justice is elusive to the people.

Hence, Africa needs to put many things right for citizens to realize their essential selves. The educational and cultural systems must help people to be unique, active, and responsible. This includes formal and informal education. There may also be the need to restructure the judicial system of many African nations for it to function in a manner that helps the individual to achieve the essential self. The restructuring may call for the amendment and promulgation of relevant laws that will improve people's freedom, make rule of law workable, promote true democracy, and also improve the electoral system. Such laws must be made to work with all parties involved. This paper recommends strongly that the lessons on fundamentals of human freedom be taught in schools starting from the elementary level.

4. The Challenge of Practical and Productive Piety

Both Kierkegaard and African existentialism are strong in matters of religion. The critical question however is; has religion helped Africa to achieve better human existence? There are nations of the world that are not religious or less religious than Africa but have more meaningful human existence. The reason for this is not far-fetched; religion in Africa has not fulfilled its existential purpose. The intention and contents of the various religions have not

translated into values profitable for human existence. Religious passion must translate to existential values for Africa to enjoy the benefits of religion.

Existential lessons and messages in African religions must be made to have positive and productive effects on the people. For example, the passion for one's religion must accommodate the passion of others for their religions. By this, Africans will reduce the rate of religious crisis and fundamentalism that have cost many lives within the continent. In addition, religion according to Kierkegaard should help people confront their guilt and become better moral actors. This message is important because many existential issues in Africa are products of low morality. Religion should help the practitioners to be conscious of the guilt of bad actions like corruption, bad leadership, self-centeredness, and others that have derailed the wheel of human progress in the continent. Hence, religious commitment and passion should be made to be productive. Religious bodies and practitioners should activate the aspect of their religions that helps people meet their social needs. Religious bodies should be involved actively in the empowerment of the masses and different advocacy. They must be the mouthpiece of the oppressed and the downtrodden.

Kierkegaard opines that religion requires the personal involvement of the individual that the clergy and any religious leader cannot mediate. This means that the relationship with God is largely personal. The implication is that religious leaders should allow people the freedom to relate to God and understand God from personal experiences while they provide direction. The truth today in many parts of Africa is that religious leaders are becoming overbearing in the influence they assert on practitioners. This overwhelming influence can impede individual freedom. The uncontrolled influence has also opened many practitioners to deceit and manipulation of some religious leaders. Unfortunately, religious activities are not controlled in many parts of Africa.

5. The Challenge of Moral Revival

African culture does not only emphasize religious commitment, it also promotes high moral standards. Unfortunately, this has dropped over time and many reasons have been adduced to this. Whatever reasons may be responsible for the drop in African

morality, the truth remains that for Africa to develop, the existential aspects of her moral system must be revived. This study, therefore, argues for a moral revival in Africa. This is because sound morality has a direct relationship with the desire of African societies to develop and also improve the human condition. The majority of African existential problems like corruption, greed, insecurity, religious intolerance are moral problems. Corruption, for example, has a direct effect on infrastructural decay, bad economy, insufficient educational facilities, and many others.

Moral revival is also important for the individual to become his or her essential self. This is because morality is a precondition for self-discipline and the latter is a prerequisite for self-actualization. An undisciplined individual will find it difficult to fully fulfill his potentials. Kierkegaard talks about the Aesthetic stage, which is the stage of individual pleasure. However, excessive pleasure is a demonstration of indiscipline that may prevent the individual from achieving his essential self. The revival must necessarily address the tendency of the present generation to drift from one level of pleasure to another. Many in contemporary Africa are ruled by erotic sensation. No society will develop to full capacity with such a mentality. There is, therefore, the need for individuals to accept their roles as moral actors. African morality should be revived in a manner that rates it above individual pleasure, greed, and self-centeredness. Leaders and philosophers in Africa must make a concerted effort to tackle the tendencies of Kierkegaard's aesthetic stage.

6. The Challenge of a balanced Communal Life

Kierkegaard's individualistic philosophy challenges Africa's communal system to give room for individual self-actualization, self-realization, and the essential self. While the African communal system is productive in its ability to give the individual some form of social security and identity, its argument must not be overstretched to impeding individual freedom in achieving potentials, being unique, and demonstrating self-distinctiveness.

Society should assist the individual to be a productive member by being *actors and not spectators*. This is by helping individuals to be productively active and not passive in the drama of life. The

individual must not be coarse to lose the self-confidence necessary for self-actualization. Society must encourage the ability and capacity of individuals to make decisions that will impact lives.

The Individual has a role to play in his or her attainment of authentic existence. He is very important in whatever becomes of his destiny. It is impossible to separate the individuals from their destiny no matter the strength of communal living. There is a need, therefore, for the community to create such a social environment that encourages and promotes individual initiative and uniqueness; an environment that helps the individual to exhaust all his phenomenal aspects and also transcend self.

For Africa to develop and improve the quality of human existence, there must be a deliberate intention by individuals to positively activate their freedom to contribute to the development of humanity. African countries must also be willing to free the people from any form of chain that limits their capacity to achieve projects that can improve the quality of human existence. Individuals must, however, know that individual existence attracts social responsibility. Freedom in this regard cannot be unfiltered and unrestrained. Individuals should accept the social security and identity that the communal system provides. This is needed in the attempt by the individual to attain self-fulfillment. For it is in the community that the individual gets values and beliefs, establishes the deepest and most enduring relationships, gets his identity, and also finds purpose in life.³² Therefore, the best approach is to treat the relationship between the individual and the society as complementary and not competitive.

More importantly, Africa must make productive use of its communal system. The greatest benefit of the African “we philosophy” is that it facilitates a sense of belongingness among the people.³³ This sense of belonging must be made to have developmental effects on the people. Belongingness without development is of no benefit to the people and therefore inconsequential to human existence in society.

Conclusion

The thesis of this paper presented Kierkegaard’s existentialism as a template that can be studied, critiqued, and used to project a better human existence in Africa. This was done by first discussing the

core issues in Kierkegaard's existentialism and thereafter, engaged in a comparative analysis of these core issues within the contents of African existentialism. Though African existentialism is good, it is, however, not sufficient to give man the best of the world possible. The need, therefore, for a social critique of African existentialism. Western existentialism represented by the Philosophy of Kierkegaard can be of help in this sense.

This study acknowledged that most African societies have failed to improve the quality of human existence despite the enormous material and human resources available to the continent. It, therefore, charges leaders, Philosophers in Africa to rise above the present challenge so that Africans can have a better and qualitative human existence. It challenged leadership in Africa to be proactive in effecting necessary structural changes so that Africa can occupy her rightful place among the community of nations.

Endnotes

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