

EXISTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS OF FAITH AND ABSURDITY AS AUTHENTIC EXISTENCE IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF SOREN KIERKEGAARD

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Abstract

Soren Kierkegaard, the Danish melancholic existentialist philosopher and acclaimed father of existentialism, explores the place of faith and absurdity in the human quest for authentic existence. Kierkegaard believes that the path to authentic existence passes through a hierarchical, though not necessarily rigid three stages of existence: aesthetic, ethical, and ultimately the religious stage. Authentic existence is achieved in the last stage, the religious stage which is a life lived in faith in God and most times absurd obedience to his command in a way that transcends thought and rational comprehension. The objective of the paper is to reflect on the meanings and implications of faith and absurdity in Søren Kierkegaard's philosophy as the paths to authentic existence focusing on the diverse implications it has for formulating and holding personal existential credo, spirituality and embracing existential uncertainty. The work adopts expository method as it began with a cursory look at the general meaning of authentic existence, different perspectives on Kierkegaard's notion of faith and absurdity as the path to authentic existence and then explores the stages in the journey to the authentic existence. This is concluded by exploration of the diverse existential implications of Kierkegaard's notion of authentic existence and that way proposes a new existential epistemology that, though does not denigrate reason and logic, yet prioritizes faith and absurdity over reason and logic in the search for authentic existence.

Introduction

One of the central quests of man is authentic existence; a mode of existence in which the individual takes on and lives his own life; makes choices of his own, according to his will. Jean-Paul Sartre, the famous French philosopher and champion of existentialism encapsulates the centrality of human quest authentic life, where individuals take ownership of their choices and live according to their own will. His words are below:

The existentialist's effort is always to make a person realize the gravity of his decisions and the absolute character of the commitment he makes by existing. Therefore, one of the central aims of existentialism is to make every human being fully conscious of his freedom and to make him take responsibility for his own life, to make him live his own life. ¹

Authenticity is the degree to which a person's actions are congruent with his values and desires, despite external pressures to social conformity. There have been a range of interpretations by existentialist philosophers and psychologists of what it means to live authentically or to achieve authentic existence. In his work *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Charles Taylor explains that

¹Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology Trans by Hazel E. Barnes, (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956), 483.

"authenticity involves being true to oneself and acting in accordance with one's own values and desires, rather than simply conforming to the expectations and pressures of society. It is the degree to which a person's actions align with their true self, despite the external pressures to conform."² In *Beyond Good and Evil* Friedrich Nietzsche, one of the pioneers of existentialism viewed authentic existence as living in accordance with one's "will to power" and the creation of one's own values. He criticized conventional morality and societal norms, advocating for a life that transcends herd mentality. For Nietzsche, authenticity involves the courage to assert one's own individuality and create meaning in an otherwise meaningless world.³

For Martin Heidegger the concept of "Being-towards-death" is central to authentic existence because it involves a recognition of one's own mortality and the finite nature of life. By confronting the reality of death, individuals can live more genuinely, making choices that are true to their own essence rather than being dictated by the "They-self" (das Man), which represents societal expectations.⁴

Jean-Paul Sartre emphasized existential freedom and the responsibility that comes with it. He argued that authentic existence requires acknowledging one's freedom to make choices and the responsibility for the consequences of those choices. Sartre believed that individuals often escape this responsibility by falling into "bad faith," where they deceive themselves into thinking they have no choice. Authenticity, for Sartre, involves living in accordance with one's true nature and accepting the burden of freedom.⁵

Simone de Beauvoir, Sartre's close intellectual ally and acquaintance extended existentialist ideas of authentic existence to include the concept of "the Other," particularly in the context of gender. She argued that authentic existence involves overcoming the limitations imposed by societal roles and expectations, especially those related to gender. For her, authenticity is achieved through self-determination and rejecting the roles assigned by a patriarchal society.⁶

Albert Camus discussed the idea of the "absurd," the conflict between the human desire for meaning and the indifferent universe. He suggested that authentic existence involves acknowledging the absurdity of life and continuing to live with passion and defiance despite this lack of inherent meaning. For Camus, authenticity means embracing the absurd and living fully in the present moment.⁷

²Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 15

³ Frederick Nietzsche "Beyond Good and Evil": Translated by Walter Kaufmann (Vintage Books, 1966). See sections 44-46 in Part I, sections 201-203 in Part V, and the entirety of Part IX.

⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (Harper and Row New York, 1962). "Being-towards-death" begin around page 279 and continue through page 311, with detailed exploration of the concept of authenticity in the context of death and mortality.

⁵ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*., Chapter two, Bad faith, 86 -116

⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, translated by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, (Gallimard, 1949), 21-35

⁷ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, translated by Justin O'Brien, Alfred A. Knopf, (New York, 1955), "The Absurd Reasoning" , 1-48

Existential Psychologists like Rollo May and Viktor Frankl emphasize the therapeutic aspect of authentic existence. May for instance in *Man's Search for Himself* argue that living authentically involves a deep engagement with one's own existence, including an honest confrontation with anxiety, guilt, and existential concerns. Authentic existence, in this view, is closely tied to finding purpose and meaning in life, often through personal growth and self-actualization.⁸ Frankl, a psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, developed logotherapy, a form of existential analysis which focuses on finding meaning and purpose in life, even in the face of suffering. His seminal work discussing these ideas is *Man's Search for Meaning*. The Part One: "Experiences in a Concentration Camp" describes Frankl's experiences in Nazi concentration camps and how finding meaning helped him survive. He discusses the concept of "tragic optimism," the belief that one can find meaning and purpose despite life's inherent suffering. Part Two: "Logotherapy in a Nutshell": outlines Frankl's principles of logotherapy, emphasizing that authentic existence involves discovering personal meaning and purpose, even in adversity.⁹

However, while the aforementioned generally stress the relationship between the individual and the society or the external in the search or journey to authentic existence, Søren Kierkegaard while still emphasizing the importance of individual choice and responsibility in achieving authentic existence or that true authenticity involves a personal commitment to living according to one's own beliefs and values, rather than conforming to societal norms, yet for him authentic existence transcends all these horizontal concerns and points more towards the vertical, the divine. Authentic existence for Kierkegaard is not just about being deaf and blind to the society but even to oneself; to one's logic and reason in order to listen to God alone in faith taking a leap at his behest into the unknown, embracing the absurd.¹⁰ His major work in this area, *Fear and Trembling*, through the story of Abraham and Isaac, explores the nature of faith and absurdity, the "teleological *suspension* of the ethical," and the concept of the "leap of faith," all involving "objective uncertainty" and "passion of inwardness" as the paths to authentic existence. The Howard and Edna Hong's translation of *Fear and Trembling* captures Kierkegaard's mind on faith thus:

Faith is precisely the paradox that the single individual as the single individual is higher than the universal, is justified over against it, is not subordinate but superior—yet in such a way, please note, that the movement repeats itself, so that the individual, after having

⁸ see Rollo May, *Man's Search for Himself*, (W.W. Norton & Company, New York), Chapter 2: "An Age of Anxiety", from pages 22–43. May discusses the pervasive experience of anxiety in modern life and the importance of confronting it honestly as part of the journey toward authentic existence. Chapter 5: "The Struggle to Be Real": Pages 93–114 explores the concept of authenticity, including the need for individuals to engage deeply with their own existence and find personal meaning.

⁹ Viktor Frankl, "Man's Search for Meaning" (Original Title: *Ein Psycholog erlebt das Konzentrationslager* (translated as "A Psychologist Experiences the Concentration Camp"). 1946 (first German edition), 1959 (English translation), Beacon Press, Boston (English edition). Translated by Ilse Lasch. See part one pages 3-97 and part two pages 98 - 154

¹⁰ Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*. Translated by Alastair Hannay, (Penguin Books, 1985), Key sections include the "Exordium" and "Eulogy on Abraham.")

been in the universal as the single individual, then sets himself apart as the single individual over against the universal. If this is not faith, then Abraham is lost, then faith has never existed in the world because it has always existed—but precisely by existing it has existed in this paradox.¹¹

The problem of this paper is that Kierkegaard's concepts of faith and absurdity as the paths to authentic existence with emphasis on transcending the natural order, reason and logic embodies some contradictions to rationality, systematic thinking and ethical reasoning. Explaining how the whole path to authentic existence is laden with anxiety, possibility in freedom's struggle to assert itself, Kierkegaard says:

Anxiety is the dizziness of freedom, which emerges when the spirit wants to posit the synthesis, and freedom looks down into its own possibility, laying hold of finiteness to support itself. Freedom succumbs in this dizziness. Further, anxiety is not a determinate fear of something external, but an internal state that reveals the individual's absolute freedom and the infinite possibilities therein. This anxiety can only be overcome by a leap, transcending reason and embracing faith.¹²

The objective of the paper therefore is to reflect on the meanings and implications of faith and absurdity in Søren Kierkegaard's philosophy, focusing on the contradictions and how possibly they can lead to authentic existence. A study of Kierkegaard's very peculiar idea of how to achieve authentic existence which transcends thought and embraces absurdity is significant in a world ruled by certainty, objectivity, rationality and scientific consciousness. This movement from possibility to actuality which underscores the essence of Kierkegaard's existential progression, highlights the fact that reality cannot be fully captured by thought alone. Kierkegaard says: "The paradox is really the pathos of the intellectual life and the passion of thought, and the thinker without the paradox is like a lover without feeling: a paltry mediocrity. The supreme paradox of all thought is the attempt to discover something that thought cannot think."¹² Jaspers puts it like this: "Authentic existence is not merely a matter of thought, but of existence itself. It involves a leap into the unknown, a confrontation with the 'encompassing,' which cannot be fully articulated or understood by rational means alone."¹³ For Frederick Schelling "the truth is not something to be known as an object, but something in which one can only participate through an act of self-surrender. This participation is an act of freedom that transcends mere intellectual comprehension."¹⁴

Perspectives on Kierkegaard's Notion of Faith and the Absurd

Kierkegaard's concept of faith as a passionate contradiction between inwardness and objective certainty, otherwise absurd, has been underscored variously by several Kierkegaardian scholars. Robert L. Perkins, in "Two Ages: International Kierkegaard Commentary," discusses Kierkegaard's notion of actuality, which suspends thought and presents life's realities,

¹¹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*, Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, (Princeton University Press, 1983), 54.

¹² Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, Translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, (Princeton University Press, 1985), 37.

¹³ Karl Jaspers, *Philosophy of Existence*. Translated by Richard F. Grabau, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 65.

¹⁴ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, *Philosophical Inquiries into the Nature of Human Freedom*. Translated by James Gutmann, (Open Court Publishing 1936), 77.

particularly where thought cannot reach. He noted that Kierkegaard emphasizes that possibility, grounded in individual self-making and ideal human requirements, operates in the realms of ethics and religion, leading to a continuous self-projection. Similarly Robert C. Solomon, in "No Excuses: Existentialism and the Meaning of Life," explains that actuality for Kierkegaard is realized through personal choice and freedom, essential for the ethicist, while the religious stage involves an ongoing project of self-making, where possibility generates new possibilities. Kierkegaard views the possibility of offense as integral to Christianity, creating despair, which paradoxically leads to faith.¹⁵ Alexander Dru, in "The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard," and Elmer Duncan, in "Søren Kierkegaard: Maker of the Modern Theological Mind," elaborate on possibility's role in existential movements, faith, and the dialectical nature of Christianity.¹⁶ Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong highlight that faith, seen as the highest passion, sustains the individual against absurdity and uncertainty. The individual's constant striving toward possibilities, actualization, and ultimately, religious faith is the apex of absurdity. The qualitative leap, absurdity, and anxiety are central to Kierkegaard's understanding of faith and existence, with faith and absurdity forming the core of his religious existentialism.

In the work "Re-Staging Existence: Revisiting Kierkegaard's Theory of Life Stages" Calvo de Feijoo et al re-evaluate Kierkegaard's stages of existence, emphasizing their fluid nature and rejecting a rigid hierarchy. The author argues that Kierkegaard's use of pseudonyms reflects his intent to engage readers in self-reflection rather than provide authoritative instruction. They said: "the aesthetic, ethical, and religious stages are not distinct developmental phases but rather perspectives that individuals oscillate between."¹⁷ In a paper "The Rescue of the Aesthetic Character of Existence in Kierkegaard" Binetti M.J. highlights the aesthetic stage's role in Kierkegaard's philosophy, arguing that it is foundational rather than merely a preliminary phase. The aesthetic experience, characterized by immediacy and indetermination, is seen as essential in confronting existential boredom and despair. Binetti wrote "Immediacy, indetermination, indifference, abstract negativity, pure possibility—these constitute the aesthetic stage, challenging individuals to face the limits of mere sensory experience."¹⁸

The work "Kierkegaard's Constitutivism: Agency, the Stages of Existence and the Issue of Motivation" explores Kierkegaard's view on the stages of existence concerning individual agency and motivation. It suggests that the transition between stages, especially from the ethical to the religious, involves a significant shift in personal commitment and understanding of selfhood. It states: "The ethical stage demands a commitment to universal moral laws, yet it is only in the religious stage that one transcends these laws through a personal relationship with the divine."¹⁹ To fully comprehend, the journey to faith and absurdity which are the paths to authentic existence, it is important to look the stages leading to them

¹⁵Robert C. Solomon, in "No Excuses: Existentialism and the Meaning of Life

¹⁶ Alexander Dru, in "The Journals of Søren Kierkegaard," and Elmer Duncan, in "Søren Kierkegaard: Maker of the Modern Theological Mind,"

¹⁷ Calvo de Feijoo, Ana Maria Lopez, and Myriam Moreira Protasio "Re-Staging Existence: Revisiting Kierkegaard's Theory of Life Stages". *Journal of Religion and Health*, 2023.

¹⁸Binetti, M. J. "The Rescue of the Aesthetic Character of Existence in Kierkegaard" *Journal of Religion and Health*, 2023.

¹⁹ Kierkegaard's Constitutivism: Agency, the Stages of Existence and the Issue of Motivation *Kierkegaard Studies Yearbook*, 2011.

The Three Stages (Spheres) of Existence in Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard's existential taxonomy includes three primary stages or spheres of existence: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. Each stage or sphere represents a different approach to life; or delineates the different modes or levels of human existence or a different way of understanding one's existence. The stages are explored in depth in works such as *Either/Or* and *Stages on Life's Way*. Kierkegaard's use of "spheres"²⁰ often denotes a qualitative distinction, suggesting different realms of existence with specific characteristics and ways of being. The term "stages" emphasizes the process and progression from one mode of existence to another. Despite these terminological differences, the underlying idea is that human existence can be understood as moving through different levels or phases, each with its own challenges and ways of relating to the world and to oneself.

The Aesthetic Stage

The aesthetic stage is characterized by a pursuit of pleasure, immediate gratification, and sensory experiences. Individuals in this stage are driven by emotions, desires, and the pursuit of beauty and enjoyment. They are often detached from ethical or moral considerations and focus on personal satisfaction and enjoyment of the moment. The aesthetic stage includes moods such as irony, anxiety, melancholy, and despair, and its motto could be described as "pleasure of the moment." The aesthete constructs a world of dreams, lives in the immediate present, and rejects universal moral standards. One passage that reflects the aesthetic stage's emphasis on choice and the consequences of those choices, often highlighting the transient nature of pleasure and the paradoxes of life is "marry, and you will regret it; don't marry, you will also regret it; marry or don't marry, you will regret it either way. Whether you marry or don't marry, you will regret both."²¹

The Ethical Stage

The ethical stage which is the next after the aesthetic stage, for Kierkegaard represents a shift towards responsibility, duty, and commitment to moral principles. In this stage, individuals recognize the importance of universal rules of conduct and strive to live according to these ethical standards. They commit to societal norms and the fulfilment of one's duties. "The ethical as such is the universal, that applies to everyone, which is to say, it applies at every moment. It rests in itself, it has no outside, it has nothing outside itself that can be given as its teleological ground."²² This passage highlights the ethical stage's focus on universal principles, responsibility, and commitment, contrasting it with the aesthetic stage's focus on individual

²⁰In some translations of Kierkegaard's works, we have "spheres" while in others we have "stages" as seen in the translations by Alastair Hannay and by Howard and Edna Hong. Although they exhibit subtle differences in terminology, the essential ideas remain consistent. The variations in translation between Alastair Hannay and Howard and Edna Hong highlight different emphases in Kierkegaard's works. Hannay often uses the term "sphere" to denote the broader categories of existence, whereas the Hongs may use "realm" to refer to the stages without the explicit term "sphere." These differences may reflect the translators' choices or their interpretations of Kierkegaard's original Danish terms.

²¹ Pseudonymous, A "Diapsalmata" in *Either/Or*, Vol 1.

²² "Judge William" *Either/Or* Vol II" The section titled "Equilibrium between the Aesthetic and the Ethical in the Development of Personality")

pleasure and immediacy. While the ethical man understands that true happiness comes from adherence to these moral laws, but he also becomes aware of his own limitations and guilt when failing to live up to these standards, and this leads him to the religious stage.

The Religious Stage

The religious stage is the highest sphere of existence and involves a personal relationship with God, and it is the stage marked by faith and absurdity. The religious person understands and recognizes the limitations of both the aesthetic and ethical stages thus recognizes the need for God. At this stage, the individual lives, not in his own power and strength of will but in faith. In the words of Kierkegaard "Faith captures the essence of the religious stage, where individual faith and a personal relationship with the divine transcend universal ethical norms."²³ In Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, apart from a mention of other spheres of existence: the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious, there is a distinction between religiousness A, and religiousness B. Religiousness A features inward dialectic in self-annihilation before God while Religiousness B otherwise known as paradoxical religiousness, is characterized by irrationality and a rejection of immanence, focusing on existential pathos and infinite resignation with faith and absurdity as the beacons of existence. Religiousness B is marked by a leap of faith, a move beyond rationality that embraces the paradoxes of faith. What living in faith means follows below.

Kierkegaard on Faith

Kierkegaard sees faith as the peak of authentic existence. Faith, as an emotional disposition, signifies a conviction or belief in something without concrete evidence. In Kierkegaard's words "faith is a "leap" that transcends the ethical and aesthetic stages of existence, moving into a personal, subjective relationship with the divine. Faith involves embracing the absurd and making a passionate commitment to God despite the lack of objective certainty."²³ Faith is both a miracle and a passion, essential for belief. It is the highest passion, "a holy, pure and humble expression of divine madness."²⁴ In *Fear and Trembling*," Kierkegaard states that faith "is not an aesthetic emotion but something far higher, precisely because it has resignation as its presupposition; it is not an immediate instinct of the heart, but the paradox of life and existence."²⁵ In *The Sickness unto Death*, Kierkegaard elaborates that faith concerns the individual's inward relationship with themselves, enabling them to leap towards the impossible, or the absurd.²⁶ In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard illustrates this with the story of Abraham, who is commanded by God to sacrifice his son Isaac. Abraham's willingness to obey this command, despite its ethical absurdity, exemplifies the leap of faith. That is in Kierkegaard faith and reason are seen as contradictory. While reason involves speculation, reflection, and objectivity faith is immediate and transcends rational thought. Faith surpasses the limits of reflection. While reason can help approach faith, it cannot replace or fully comprehend it.

Kierkegaard outlines the conditions necessary for faith. The first is passion. Faith must not lose passion, as it is essential for its existence. This can be found in the discussion of the "knight of

²³ Fear and Trembling, 58

²⁴ Fear and Trembling, 59

²⁵ Fear and Trembling, 46

²⁶ Kierkegaard, *Sickness Unto Death*, translation by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton University Press- 1983), 35

faith" and the nature of faith's inwardness in *Fear and Trembling*.²⁷ The second condition for faith is risk. Faith involves taking risks, and the level of risk grows with faith.²⁸ Faith is also characterized by consistent interest and requires a continual commitment and vigilance.²⁹ Ultimately faith involves crucifixion of understanding as it requires giving up rational understanding. This idea is particularly associated with the concept of the "leap of faith" and the paradox of faith.³⁰

Faith, therefore, is not for beginners or the slow-witted. Kierkegaard also describes faith as the contradiction between infinite passion of inwardness and objective uncertainty because faith necessitates believing in the possibility of what seems humanly impossible, leading to the concept of faith as a paradox. This paradoxical nature signifies that faith transcends rational thought and universal ethical values, requiring a leap into the absurd.³¹ Kierkegaard also portrays faith as a movement involving infinite resignation, which precedes the movement of faith. Infinite resignation requires strength and courage and leads to the individual's realization of their eternal validity.

Kierkegaard writes, "Faith is namely this paradox that the single individual is higher than the universal." This statement captures the essence of the religious stage, where individual faith and a personal relationship with the divine transcend universal ethical norms. The leap of faith involves a "teleological suspension of the ethical," where the individual must suspend their adherence to universal moral principles in favour of a higher divine command. This is not to suggest that ethical norms are unimportant, but rather that there are moments when the relationship with God requires a suspension of the ethical for a higher purpose.

Kierkegaard on the Absurd

Some synonyms of the word absurd include irrational, preposterous, ludicrous, foolish, nonsensical, unreasonable, bizarre, ridiculous, outlandish, laughable all of which in existentialism refer to defying logic or social expectations in favour of personal authenticity. Something is absurd if it lacks logical or reasonable grounding especially when faced with choices that defy traditional reasoning. In Kierkegaard the absurd begins with transition from religiousness A to religiousness B when the existing individual, in obedience to God lives a life most times contrary to what is coherent to reason, often provoking thought about the meaning of seriousness of life. Kierkegaard's notion of the "absurd" lacks wisdom or sound judgement, devoid of meaning or logic, strange, outlandish, alien, challenging societal norms, worthy of scorn, a negative dialectical predicate signifying a qualitative end of the purely human and lead to either religious or existential interpretations. The absurd has no guaranteed outcome, refers to the contradiction between the infinite and the finite, the eternal and the temporal, the divine and the human. It is in faith according to Kierkegaard, which involves embracing this absurd existence, where the individual acknowledges the limits of human understanding and accepts the paradoxes of faith that authentic, real, fulfilling existence begins. What this this means in our daily existence follows.

²⁷ Fear and Trembling, 47-49.

²⁸ Fear and Trembling, 53-54

²⁹ Fear and Trembling, 49-50

³⁰ Fear and Trembling, 47, 55-57

³¹ Fear and Trembling, 54-55

Implications of Faith and Absurdity and Authenticity in Existential choices

Kierkegaard's position that authentic existence, is only possible in the level of faith and absurdity comes with a lot of existential implications. First, there is a lot from this for forging personal existential credo and spirituality. An individual existential credo refers to a personal set of beliefs or principles an individual develops in response to his own truth or meaning.³² J. Smith puts it this way:

Each individual is tasked with crafting a unique set of beliefs, a personal credo that emerges not from societal norms or external authorities, but from the deep engagement with one's own experience of truth and meaning. This credo becomes the foundation for authentic existence, guiding choices and actions in a world devoid of preordained purpose.³³

Since the authentic individual for Kierkegaard transcends social ethos or meaning predetermined or dictated by external authorities, societal norms, or religious dogma, such an individual creates his own beliefs. Authentic existence for Kierkegaard thus, suggest or implies not conforming to universal truths but realizing one's own unique ideals, a way of existence that for most parts is absurd.

Similarly, Kierkegaard's notion of authentic existence also has great implication for personal understanding, interpretation, and application of Christian beliefs and teachings in the way he relates to God, the Bible, and Christian doctrines in a personal and intimate way, shaped by his own experiences, reflections, and spiritual journey. This is clear in the submission of McGrath:

While Christian spirituality is rooted in the fundamental teachings of scripture and tradition, it allows for personal interpretation and application. The individual believer's relationship with God is shaped by personal experiences, reflections, and unique spiritual journeys, enabling them to live out their faith in ways that are both deeply personal and authentically Christian.³⁴

While such a life is grounded in the core tenets of Christianity, yet it suggests that the individual will be more flexible and can tailor his life according his own understanding of what it means to live a Christian life. Kierkegaard's argument In Concluding Unscientific Postscript, that "subjectivity is truth" gives primacy to subjectivity over objectivity.

Kierkegaard's notion of faith and absurdity also has implication for disposition towards the inherent uncertainty of life. Kierkegaard argues that human reason is finite and cannot fully comprehend the infinite nature of God or the ultimate meaning of existence in all situations. In *Philosophical Fragments*, he critiques the idea that reason alone can lead to truth or salvation, asserting that true knowledge of God comes through faith, not rational inquiry.

The implications for this is that there are aspects of life, existential decisions and choices, where reason must be transcended, and the absurd embraced. For example, in deciding who to marry or commit oneself to, a certain level of 'leap' must be exercised in order to take action. It is almost impossible to fully fathom the personality of the other such that decision to go commit to the person in question will be fully based on reason. In Macbeth Shakespeare writes

³² Smith, J. "An Individual's Existential Credo: Personal Beliefs in Response to Life's Meaning." *Journal of Existential Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2020, pp. 45-59.

³³ Smith, J.

³⁴ McGrath, Alister E. *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell, 1999, p.112

“there is no art to find the mind’s construction in the face.” Both partners, most times in defiance to reason, in attitude of leap of faith just have to marry or commit to each other in faith. It is not couples who underwent the longest or extensive counselling, personality matching or consider every detail of their compatibility that have the best relationship. The argument of Kierkegaard is that reason will never satisfy the quest for certainty of the other. "The heart has its reasons which reason knows nothing of: we know this in countless ways. It is the heart which experiences God, and not the reason. This, then, is faith: God felt by the heart, not by the reason"³⁵ so says Pascal Blaise. At the end of rational inquiry, a leap is required.

In career or vocational choices there is usually no rational guarantee of what the future holds. Faith must play out. In investment decisions while data-based, logical safe decisions should be the rule, yet at the end, faith is required. The point is that in some very delicate existential moments, between-life-and death moments, when analysis has failed or reached its limits, the individual must shut his ears to the noise from the crowd, to the bullying of logic, to the wailing of evidence and pinching of history and turn inward to listen to himself ‘alone.’ In the words of William James:

Our faith is faith in someone else's faith, and in the greatest matters this is most the case.

Our belief at the outset is not a belief in an abstract proposition, it is a belief in a concrete person. The inner significance of every crossing of the threshold of what we call faith lies in the fact that reason at last submits to something higher than itself.³⁶

Throughout history, many notable figures have taken significant life decisions based on faith, intuition, or bold confidence rather than pure reason or clear evidence. Abraham Lincoln famously switched career paths from farming to law and politics despite having limited formal education and facing constant failures in his early career. His decision to pursue public service was more intuitive than calculated, leading him to become one of the most revered U.S. presidents.³⁷ Nelson Mandela chose to marry Winnie Madikizela in 1958, even though their future was uncertain due to the apartheid regime. The political climate, his imprisonment, and the dangers surrounding his activism created circumstances far from rational certainty, yet he took the leap.³⁸ Steve Jobs left Reed College without graduating and later co-founded Apple, trusting his vision of personal computing despite minimal market demand at the time. His success was not based on clear evidence but on a belief in what could be possible.³⁹

³⁵Pascal, Blaise. *Pensées*. Translated by W. F. Trotter, E. P. Dutton, 1958, § 277

³⁶ James, William. *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*. Longmans, Green and Co., 1897, p. 13.

³⁷ Donald, David Herbert. *Lincoln*. Simon & Schuster, 1995. This biography by renowned historian David Herbert Donald provides an in-depth exploration of Lincoln's early life, including his career changes and his struggles in law and politics before becoming president.

³⁸ Mandela, Nelson. *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela*. Little, Brown and Company, 1994. Mandela's autobiography discusses his personal life, including his marriage to Winnie, and the challenges they faced during apartheid.

³⁹ Isaacson, Walter. *Steve Jobs*. Simon & Schuster, 2011,- Walter Isaacson's authorized biography of Steve Jobs covers his decision to drop out of college and his founding of Apple, highlighting his reliance on intuition and vision for the future.

Kierkegaard himself called off his engagement to Regine Olsen to fully pursue his philosophical work, a decision that seemed irrational to others but was based on his inner conviction about his spiritual and intellectual calling.⁴⁰

These individuals acted in times of uncertainty, guided by passion, conviction, or faith. Not matter the amount of effort in careful planning life is still inherently unpredictable, full of circumstances beyond human control. There is no guarantee that more information or more data equals better outcomes because data cannot account for human emotions, unforeseen circumstances or the complexities of relationships. There are certainly aspects of human existence, moments of important decisions, that cannot be fully understood through rational analysis but can only be realized through a radical act of faith, readiness to embrace the absurd and trust ‘uncertainty, even when it defies logic. For Alan Watts:

The only way to make sense out of change is to plunge into it, move with it, and join the dance. The more a thing tends to be permanent, the more it tends to be lifeless. Life is inherently unpredictable and no amount of planning can alter the inevitable uncertainty of existence. True wisdom lies not in fighting this, but in embracing it.⁴¹

That is why Kierkegaard insists that authentic life is not always found in rational analysis, but in the ‘leap’. Kierkegaard's notion of the leap of faith thus offers a powerful counter-narrative to the modern emphasis on reason, science, and empirical evidence as the sole means of understanding reality, making progress in life and being sure of outcomes. In a world that often prioritizes rationality, science, and empirical evidence, Kierkegaard's notion of faith and absurdity challenges us to recognize the importance of faith and the role it plays in achieving authentic existence. This is particularly relevant in an age where technological advancements and scientific discoveries often lead to a sense of entitlement over certainty and control over the world. Kierkegaard says: “Faith begins precisely where thinking leaves off. It is not a question of the system, but of the individual and his eternal significance. The individual must take the leap into the absurd, beyond the limits of rationality, for only in faith can he grasp the infinite, the divine”⁴² because there are aspects of life, particularly in the realm of faith, that cannot be fully understood through rational analysis.

It is important to remark that this approach to life as a leap into the absurd is not meant to be anti-intellectual or irrational. Rather, it is a recognition that reason has its limits, and that true authenticity requires going beyond those limits because over reliance on rational analysis may also sometimes result in decision-paralysis. In *The Sickness unto Death*, Kierkegaard explores the concept of despair and cautions against the sole reliance on reason and failing to embrace the uncertainty and paradox of faith. To overcome despair and achieve authentic existence, one must take the leap of faith and fully commit to a position even in the face of uncertainty, when data and logic no longer offer clear answers.

⁴⁰ Garff, Joakim. Søren Kierkegaard: A Biography. Princeton University Press, 2005,- This biography of Kierkegaard examines his life, including his engagement to Regine Olsen and his decision to break it off to pursue his philosophical work.

⁴¹Watts, Alan. *The Wisdom of Insecurity: A Message for an Age of Anxiety*. Pantheon Books, 1951, pp. 36-37.

⁴² Kierkegaard, Søren. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs*. Edited and translated by Alastair Hannay, Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 116-117.

Conclusion

This paper has grappled with one of the central issues in existentialism: the search or what it means to live an authentic life from the perspective of Soren Kierkegaard. The work ran through the perspectives of philosophers, especially existentialist philosophers, psychologists and others on the subject matter. Kierkegaard's highpoint however is that, while the rest of the thinkers approached authenticity purely from a horizontal cum social perspective, Kierkegaard's authenticity is vertical as it is tied to faith and the absurd and involves a leap that suspends rationality. Kierkegaard's existential stages provide a framework for understanding the complexity and progression of human life in the search for authentic existence. The aesthetic stage focuses on personal pleasure and immediate experiences, the ethical stage on duty and moral responsibility, and the religious stage on faith and a personal relationship with God. Through these stages, Kierkegaard explores the dialectical process of self-discovery and the quest for authentic existence. Søren Kierkegaard's existentialist philosophy offers a profound and challenging understanding of authentic existence, emphasizing the limitations of reason and the necessity of faith in achieving true authenticity. His philosophy challenges us to go beyond rationality and embrace the paradox of faith and absurdity especially in a world that often prioritizes reason and empirical evidence.⁴³ To live authentically, we must be willing to take the leap of faith, embrace the absurd, and trust in God, even when it defies logic.

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⁴³ Merold Westphal, *Becoming a Self: A Reading of Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Purdue University Press, 1996.

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