**AN EXAMINATION ON SOREN KIERKEGAARD’S NOTION OF HUMAN EXISTENCE**

**ABSTRACT**

**CHAPTER ONE**

**INTRODUCTION**

1.1 Background of the Study

1.2 Statement of the Problem

1.3 Aim of the Study

1.4 Justification of the Study

1.5 Significance of the Study

1.6 Methodology of the Study

1.7 Scope of the Study

1.8 Organization of the Work

1.9 Definition of Terms

**CHAPTER TWO**

**SOME EXISTENTIALISTS’ VIEWS ON HUMAN EXISTENCE**

2.1 Martin Heidegger

2.2 Jean-Paul Sartre

2.3 Karl Jaspers

2.4 Albert Camus

2.5 Friedrich Nietzsche

**CHAPTER THREE**

**KIERKEGAARDIAN NOTION OF HUMAN EXISTENCE**

3.1. His Life and Works

3.2 Individuality

3.3 Truth and Subjectivity

3.4 Death

3.5 Dread or Anxiety

3.6 Despair

3.7 The Question of Freedom And Choice

3.8 The Quest for Meaning

3.9 Stages on Life’s Way

**CHAPTER FOUR**

4.1 Evaluation

4.2 Recommendations

4.3 Conclusion

**ABSTRACT**

Soren Kierkegaard’s philosophy marks the beginning of a new way of ascribing meaning to the existing being. His contribution to this new direction was to find meaning to human existence, who exists as an individual. For him, man only realizes himself and lives authentically when he excludes himself from the crowd, takes his decisions as an individual, lives his life and faces his own death all by himself. Also, to live an authentic existence, man must take a leap of faith by suspending all universal moral obligations in absolute submission to the commands of his Creator. This work seeks to examine what Kierkegaard considers to be the gauge of meaningful and authentic human existence.It argues that Kierkegaard’s notion of individuality portrays the existing individual as selfish and egoistic as it tends to isolate him and set him against the public which he belongs. This work cautions against the consequences of this and calls for man’s conscious reflection of the extent to which he exist, as against merely living. The philosophical methods of analysis, criticism and prescription are employed, and we conclude that for man to live his authentic existence, he must exclude himself from conventional laws and external forces that may negate his own individuality, as he strives toward that for which he can live or die while being mindful of his absolute duty (dedication) to the commands of his Creator.

**CHAPTER ONE**

**INTRODUCTION**

**1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

Soren Kierkegaard is regarded as the father of contemporary existentialism. Existentialism, according to J. I. Omoregbe (39) deals “with concrete existence as opposed to essence.” This means, for the existentialists, existence precedes essence. Kierkegaard, described by Wittgenstein (cited in Pattison, 1) is “by far the most profound thinker of the last century”. His notion of human existence stems from the fact that Hegel metaphysical idealism presented human existence in an abstract, objective form. Kierkegaard saw Hegel’s philosophy “as inadequate because it shifted attention away from the concrete individual to the concept of universal” (Ozumba 86). For Ozumba (86) this implies that Hegel “merely invited humans to think instead of seeing them as existent being that should be involved in decisions and commitment that have bearing to their individuality and existence”. Kierkegaard’s thought also served as a reaction against speculative philosophy.

In his reaction, Kierkegaard built his existential thought in such a manner that it tended to become “a clarification of issue and an appeal to choose, an attempt to get men to see their existential situation and the great alternatives with which they are faced” (Copleston 336). Kierkegaard’s quest was to disassociate the conception of human existence from abstract object to questions that confront the individual as an existing being. Questions such as: What is the meaning of human life? How can one live authentically as a human person? What is the meaning of human freedom? How can one use his freedom in the face of moral chaos? are pertinent. Kierkegaard understood existence as a distinctive way of being, and that humans often focus on thought of a group to the detriment of their own unique individuality. Other than being an authentic individual, he is therefore subsumed in the crowd, thus, losing his individual self to abstract objective and societal control. In this sense, what it means, therefore, to be an authentic human being forms energetic question prompting this research on Soren Kierkegaard.

**1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The question of human existence has attracted so many considerations. There are some who approached it from the point of view of its absurdity and meaninglessness. Most of such people are atheists like Martin Heidegger, with Albert Camus and Jean Paul Sartre who played down very much, the essence of human existence as Hegel also did. However, there is the other group of existentialists who discussed human existence as a worthwhile venture. Such include the chief founder of contemporary existentialism in the person of Soren Kierkegaard. These philosophers expounded certain existential tenets which according to Lescoe (9) are geared towards “analyzing the basic structures of human existence and to call individuals to an awareness of their existence in its essential freedom”.

The problem of human existence is related wholly to this concept of freedom. Its use and abuse makes and mars man respectively. This is because freedom remains the pivot upon which man asserts himself. It is his relationship to this that categorizes him either as authentic or inauthentic individual. Thus, the measure of the meaningfulness or meaninglessness of life is highly subjective but whichever way it is determined by the degree of commitment which one puts in as he tries to assert himself by the exercise of freedom.

Another question to be examined here remains whether one can live authentically when one has no authentic relation to the community which Kierkegaard regard as the crowd? It also takes into consideration the question of freedom and choice, man’s quest for existential meaning and Kierkegaard’s analysis of man’s stages on life way.

It is therefore in a bid to clarify some of these mind-bogging issues that the researcher is out to expose what Kierkegaard considers to be the gauge or the standard of meaningful human existence. With this in view, the work is a confrontation of man with the naked facts of his freedom and duty through which he makes the best out of his life as an individual.

**1.3 AIMS/OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

In view of the above stated problems. This work aims at:

* To awakes from slumber those who are yet to give in or enjoy the latest possibilities in them while those who have lost hope in realizing meaning out of their human existence as x-rayed by their excessive obsession or addiction to working so hard are to be reminded that Kierkegaard was right when he said that “until man actualizes his essential self in God, his life is full of anxiety” (Ibe 43).
* To make all see the difficulties in life as things designed to make all better and not bitter.
* To make all realize that human existence is meaningful in so far as it is approached subjectively through individual’s personal experiences, adequate sense and use of freedom, solemn and sincere fear of the Creator.
* To oriented contemporary man with the expression of their individual potentialities to an appreciable extent.
* To ascertain the possibility that man realizes himself when he denounce his moral obligations in submission to the commandments of his Creator.
* To purge man in seeking questions as well as offering answers regarding the meaning of his existence.

**1.4 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY**

Human day-to-day challenges impact highly at all levels and leaves us with so many complexities to eventually falling into the disposition of ‘follow the trends’ for existential survival. The weaknesses in human authenticity in nearly every facet of human life or society cause man to almost be a blind copy of itself or the other person. Typically, daily problems of existence sometimes isolate us from engaging in self-realization to fully understand ourselves and deal with questions that impugn our very nature so as to realize our purpose in an ever changing and ever complex world. Man often focuses on thought of others to the detriment of his unique individuality. Other than being an authentic individual, who answers the question of freedom, meaning and faces the existential phenomenon of death, suffering, dread, despair, absurdity etc, man is otherwise subsumed in the crowd thus losing his individuality to abstract objective or societal control. Kierkegaard’s opposition to this trend and his answers to the question “what does it mean to be existing as a human being?”, informs the energetic question gingering this research on his notion of human existence. Thereby justifies the rationale behind this research bearing in mind it impact in awakening the contemporary man to the reality of himself as an existing being.

**1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

Existential philosophy rest on the conception that man must first exist, then take responsibility of creating meaning or essence for his existence. This task of creating meaning can be says to be enormous. Therefore, man must be at its best to be able to exercise such responsibility. Consequently, questions regarding the human person arise. Questions such as who is a human being? What does existence like? Or what is the meaning of man’s existence. Does man have absolute freedom to make choices? etc. It is in this sense that this research plays a significant role to man as he hopes to realize himself. Thus, the significance of this work can be outline as follows:

* It helps man to realize his purpose of existence thereby fashioning his own life through realization and reflection on himself by excluding himself from the crowd.
* Kierkegaard proposed three stages on life would benefits contemporary man to come to the actualization of his essence with the understanding that to exist is to be an individual who strives, who considers alternatives, who chooses, who decides and who makes a commitment more importantly, for ensuring existential commitment, worthy of making the individual sound, critical focused, brave, courageous and analytical minded in making decisions for his very life.
* It is also of relevance to contemporary man in re-orienting the contemporary world on the fact that self-realization and valuation is possible only if man makes personal decision out of deep personal reflection and free exercise of his will power while being ready to take responsibilities for his subjective decisions than objective crowd following.
* Also, bearing in mind the scope of epistemology which deals with the nature, scope and criterion of knowledge. The research contributes epistemologically by revealing such knowledge that qualifies such a conclusion on human nature. It’s also awakes the slumbering man to take responsibility and create his essence or meaning even in the face of existential predicaments.

**1.6 METHODOLOGY OF STUDY**

In order to give this work its required philosophical grounding, the researcher made wide consultation of research materials on Kierkegaard. The outcome of that effort is manifested in the acquisition of deep knowledge of existentialists’ concept of human existence. However, there is strict adherence to Kierkegaardian method. Some necessary opinions or insights of others are employed as and when due as the research progresses.

The work therefore employs the philosophical methods of analysis, criticism and prescription. Analytical, as to how it relates the existential ideas to subjective experiences. Critical, in that it does not assimilate all Kierkegaard’s assumptions, rather it appraises his strong points but criticizes the unwholesome aspects of his notion or teachings in regard to human existence. Prescriptive, as it seeks to prescribe answer to the questions regarding the meaning of authentic human existence.

**1.7 SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

What formed the scope of this work stems eventually from what Kierkegaard applied in his effort to ascribe meaning to human existence through authentic individuality. This implies his ideas of the individual and the mode of the individual’s existence. Also, the scope of this research covers Kierkegaard’s existential philosophy, particularly on his notion of human existence and, by extension, his thought as it affects the contemporary man.

**1.8 Organization of the Work**

The work is organized into four chapters. While chapter one introduces the work, it also presents the background of the work states the problem, aims/objectives, justification, significance, method, scope, organization of the work and definition of some keys terms. Chapter two reviews related literature, with specific attention to some other existentialists’ views on human existence. Chapter three exposes the main ideas of Kierkegaard as regards human existence. And chapter four concludes the work by evaluating Kierkegaard’s idea of human existence.

**1.9 DEFINITION OF TERMS**

**Meaning of Human**

Etymologically, the English loanword from old French “human”, ultimately from Latin “humanus”, the adjective form of homo “man”. In common usage, the species of the genes homo (anatomically and behaviourally modern homo sapiens). It usage often designates differences between that species as a while and any other group or entity. It is a synonym humanity which could be refers to a specific individual of either sex.

**DEFINING EXISTENCE**

Existence denotes the state of being alive or being real; the fact or state of existing. In other words, existence denotes the continuance or maintenance of life; living especially in adverse circumstances. It is synonymous with life, being, duration, subsistence, reality, survival, actuality, continuance, and continuation. In a nutshell, existence implies man’s way of life, situation or life style.

**What is Existentialism?**

Existentialism as a philosophical endeavour is seen differently from the perspective of different philosophers. According to R. C. Solomon, existentialism:

“is the explicit conceptual manifestation of an existential attitude–a spirit of ‘the present age’. It is a philosophical realization of a self-conscious living in a “broken world”… a world into which we are “thrown” or “condemned” yet “abandoned” and “free”…a world which appears to be indifferent or even “absurd”…” (ix)

This definition sees existentialism “as an attitude which begins with a disoriented individual, facing a confused world that he cannot accept” (Olawonyin 24). On his part, G. O. Ozumba sees existentialism as “the philosophy of human existence…concerned with the individual in the uniqueness of his existence. It therefore renounces reason, universality, abstraction and objectivity in favour of privacy, particularity, randomness and subjectivity” (87-88). Supporting this view, Idang (99) writes that “it would seem, man with his problems, is the main focus of existentialism. It is a manner of philosophizing, a way and manner of looking at the world especially of man and his place in the universe.” For Aqulanna (147) existentialism “is concerned with the ambiguities and paradoxes that constitute the inner being of man”.

From the foregoing, existentialism, generally, is a philosophical outlook that stresses man’s predicament, and lay emphasis on man existence as an individual rather than an abstract being.

**CHAPTER TWO**

**REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

**(SOME EXISTENTIALISTS’ VIEWS ON HUMAN EXISTENCE)**

Seemingly, the meaning of human existence, nay existentialism varies among existential philosophers. As a whole, however, existentialism can be characterized as a philosophy that searches for essential self, or the essential human condition. According to existentialists, human beings, having become alleviated from this essential self in existing world, find themselves caught in a state of despair and dread. Those existential philosophers devoted serious and considerable attention on how human beings may be delivered from that despair and dread. This chapter, therefore, seeks to present in brief format the views of five existentialists in order to be of added advantage to the understanding of Soren Kierkegaard’s notion on human existence, who is profound as the founder of this philosophy of man.

**2.1 MARTIN HEIDEGGER**

“Dasein”, is the human being for Martin Heidegger (1899-1976). Heidegger asserts that the ‘Being’ question have been forgotten and set forth to answering the question of the meaning of Being. According to him, being lives in the world, relates to other beings, attends to the environment surrounding itself, and cares for other people. This Being is the fundamental way of existence, which Heidegger described as “Being-in-the-world”. The implication of this Being-in-the-world is that human beings have been thrown into the world without being informed as to the origin from which they came or to the destination to which they embarked, or are going. This situation is referred to as “throwness” or “facticity”.

For Heidegger, men lose their independence when they try too hard to adjust themselves to external circumstances and to other people’s opinions. This situation, of the “they” (das man), or the “one-like-many” makes man to loose it original self. And each “They”, spends its daily life indulging in idle talk, destroyed by curiosity, and living in peaceful ambiguity which he called the “falling” of Dasein. In his words, Martin Heidegger maintains that “The “who” is not this one, not that one, not oneself (manselbst), not some people (einige), and not the sum of them all. The “who” is the neuter, the “ihty” (das man)” (164). Heidegger also asserts that, this “Dasein”, which has been thrown into the world without any reason or pre-knowledge, is also in “angst” (anxiety). Hence, humans deeply inquire into this anxiety, and as well reach the anxiety of death. However, when a person does not wait around, in anxiety, for a vague future, but positively accepts the fact that the human being is a “being-towards-death” and lives with a serious determination toward the future, that person can proceed toward the original self. In that way, human beings project themselves toward the future. This is called “projection”, whereas, the nature of this Being is called “existentiality”.

Also, the meaning of the existence of Being is temporality, that is, Being when seen from the aspect of casting itself, it can be grasped as “ahead-of-itself”, and when seen from the aspect of having already been cast, it can be grasped as “Being-already-in-itself”, and when seen from the aspect of tending the environment and caring for others, it can be grasped as “Being-alongside”. Heidegger opines, if these are seen in the light of temporality, they correspond to the future, the past, and the present respectively. Human beings, therefore, do not exist toward a solitary self, separate from the world. They exist toward the future potentiality by listening to the call of conscience, so as to save the self from present falling, while taking on the burdens of the past.

Summarily, Heidegger maintains that, it is man alone who can be said to exist. Things other than man are, but they do not exist. Man exist differently from others modes of existence. Substantiating this fact, Etim writes thus:

The fundamental difference is that man has consciousness. Man can exist authentically…. Nevertheless, man exists authentically only by undergoing certain experiences in which he is aware of himself as one who exist. These experience are fundamentally of a kind which Kierkegaard called ANGUISH or ANXIETY, “the sickness into death” (179).

**2.2 JEAN-PAUL SARTRE**

Like Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), concerned himself with Being which he distinguishes between two modes of being namely, (‘le pour-soi’) for-itself and (‘en-soi’) in-itself. Sartre presents the in-self as existing without justification independently of the for-itself. It exists fully determinate and in a non-relational way. Objects such as tables, trees, stones, sands etc are referred to as Being-in-itself (Entre-pour-soi). In Etim words “Being-in-itself is the realm of human consciousness, and the essential parts of consciousness is that it is always outside of and ahead of itself” (179).

Also, Sartre explains that, in human conditions, ‘existence precedes essence’. Sartre proceeds thus:

What is meant here by saying that existence precedes essence? It means that, first of all, man exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and, only afterwards, defines himself. If man, as the existentialist conceives him, is nothing. Only afterward will be something, and he himself will have made what he will be. This, there is no human nature, since there is no God to conceive it (521).

What this means is that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the universe and defines himself afterwards.

Moreover, Sartre says that “existence is subjectivity”. Corroborating this fact, Solomon (378) writes that, Sartre begins by saying that “what existentialists have in common implies the fact that they believe that existence comes before essence-or, if you will, that we must begin from the subjective”. In Sartre‘s view, human beings are accidental beings that appeared from nothing that are not defined by anyone. Therefore, people themselves plan what they will be like, they choose themselves. This, Sartre called “subjectivity”. In other words, people choose what they will become whether they will be Christians or Pagans; whether they will remain single or to marry. The fundamental feature of such an existence is “anguish”, according to Sartre. People choose themselves, which means, at the same time, that in making this choice, he also chooses all men. Therefore, to choose one self means to take responsibility for the whole of human kind, a responsibility that incorporates anguish. However, anguish restricts them not from acting; on the contrary, it is the very condition of their action, and it is a part of action itself.

In his *Being and Nothingness,* Sartre argued that “man being condemned to be free carries the weight of the whole world on his shoulders; he is responsible for the world and for himself as a way of being” (505). In his view, since existence precedes essence, humans are not determined by anything and are allowed to do anything. Being free however, implies that the entire responsibility for their deeds lives with themselves. In that sense, being free is a kind of burden for humans, and the human being is a “being condemned to be free” (707). In other words, human beings are in anguish because they are free. Sartre explains his view on human existence thus:

Man is free, man is freedom. On the other hand, if God does not exist, we find no values or commands to turn to which legitimize our conduct. So, in the bright realm of value, we have no excuse behind us, nor justification before us. We are alone, with no excuse. That is the idea I shall try to convey when I say that man is condemned to be free (523-524).

**2.3 KARL JASPERS**

For Karl Jaspers (1883-1969), existence is the state of being truly awakened to oneself as an individual. According to Jaspers, “existence is never objectified source of my thoughts and actions…. It is what relates to itself, and thus to its transcendence” (56). This view is basically the same as Kierkegaard’s on existence, for Karl Jaspers, that is in the process of attaining the original existence, having not yet encountered Transcendence, or the comprehensive (das Umgtwifende), is called a “positive existence”. According to Jaspers, usually, human beings are potential existence that lives in various circumstances; but by acting upon the given circumstances, they can live positively. However, he points out that “certain situations exist that we cannot go over or change, such as death, suffering, struggle, and guilt. These are called boundary situations” (Jaspers 178).

Though humans may wish for eternal living, yet not a single person can escape death. In Jaspers’ view, death is the denial of one’s own existence. And human existence involves various kinds of suffering, such as physical pains, senility, diseases, and starvation. As long as humans live, for Jaspers, struggles are unavoidable. In other words, people lived with unavoidable guilt that their own existence cannot but exploit others. Under such boundary situation, Karl Jaspers’ view is that, people cannot but despair and become frustrated, becoming aware of their own limitations. And at that moment, the way people classifies that frustration will determine what will become of them. If they face their frustration head-on and endure it silently, honestly, and without trying to escape from, the situation, they wills come to experience the reality that originally exists, transcending the world of existence.

**2.4 ALBERT CAMUS**

For Albert Camus (1913-1960), the question of human existence, is the question of the meaning of life. Questions such as what is the meaning of life? Does life have any meaning at all? For Camus, the answer is simple, although shocking; life is nothingness, purposeless, meaningless and absurd. Human existence is nothing but a cosmic joke “in which the major actors wait vainly for an understanding of their situation” (Edim, 182-183). For Camus, human life is a life of tears, sickness, suffering, anguish, old age and death, and death is the only real thing, anything beside death supposes futility. And death stands above life, thus to hope for after-life, is a vain hope.

Moreover, Albert Camus sees no necessary rationale for human existence, since “man just found himself existing. But he exists more like an exile because life to him is a long road to nowhere” (Edim, 183). Camus described the human world as an “existential nightmare”, where tyrannies, disease, war, death is home. However, contrary to the pointlessness of life, Camus argues that, it still had to be lived. Life is full of anguish, suffering, torment, sorrow and all manner of cruelty. But if man can come together and resist the meaninglessness burden of which life seemingly impose; and if men can unite to recreate life, they can reduces human sufferings and make life a living worth. Human life can turn out to be meaningful and purposeful. Thus, for Camus, man has a duty to create meaning out of life.

**2.5 FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE**

Contrary to Kierkegaard’s opinion that only by standing before God can man become original self. Nietzsche claims that it is only when humans free themselves from faith in God that they can then become original selves. Nietzsche proclaims that “God is death” and attacked Christianity. For him, Christian morality oppressed human life and the physical body by means of such concepts as ‘God’ and ‘Soul’, and through the negative view of the reality of life, blocked the way or the development of stronger people. Nietzsche describes the Christian morals ‘slave of morality’ that supported only the weak and the suffering, and also rejected the Christian life of spirituality and love, affirming instead, a life based on instinct, or a way of life as desired by life itself.

Fredrick Nietzsche views human life as a force to grow, or the force to develop. He argues that, behind every human act, there exists a ‘will to power’ (Willezurmacht), which seeks to increase the individual’s strength. According to Nietzsche (226) “where I found the living, there I found will to power, and even in the will of those who serve, I found the will to be master”. After this rejection of the Christianity “slave morality”, he promulgated instead “master morality”, which in his view made power its standard of value.

**WORKS CITED**

Edim, O. O. “Existentialism” (164) In: I. I. Asouzu (Ed.) *Philosophy and Logic Today*. Calabar: The Africa Pacific and Allied Press, 2002.

Etim, Cyril “Contemporary Movements in Philosophy” In: Udo Etuk and I. Isiket (Eds) *Philosophy and Human Existence.* Uyo: Robertminder Int’l Ltd., 2013.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time.* John Macquarie and Edward Robinson (Trans) Southampton: Basil Blackwell, 1962.

Jasper, Karl. *Philosophy Vol. 2*. E. B. Ashton (Ed.) Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1969.

Nietzsche F. *Thus Sparke Zarathustra* . Walter Kaufman (Trans) New York: Penguin Books, 1982.

Sartre, Jean–Paul. *Being and Nothingness.* New York: Washington Square Press, 1956.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ “Existentialism is a Humanism” In R. Gill and E. Sherman (Eds.) *The Fabric of Existentialism.* New York: Meredith Corporation, 1973.

**CHAPTER THREE**

**KIERKEGAARDIAN NOTION OF HUMAN EXISTENCE**

Although the answer to the question of the meaningfulness of human existence has not been handed down as a simple fact, but it has been discussed profoundly variously through the epochs of philosophy. In other words, it is continuously subjected to rigorous rational analysis allowing it attract divergent interpretations among philosophers. Ordinarily, the concept of human existence remains the focal point of all Kierkegaard’s thought. He is fundamentally concerned with the question “what is the meaning of human existence?” In other words, what does it mean to exist as an individual? Corroborating this fact, Edim (176) writes that throughout Kierkegaard’s writing, “he consciously tries to create an acute awareness of the meaninglessness of human existence, and drive home his point, which is that man’s life is anguished, absurd, harrowing and meaningless”. Existing, for Kierkegaard, meant becoming more and more individual, but this is not given to all human beings in the same measure, because we may be driving in an inauthentic way. Kierkegaard points out that, it is not the case that one who belongs to the class of human beings leads a human existence. He seems to imply that few people or at least, a small amount of people authentically exist as human beings.

Thus, the question is: What does it mean to live fully in a human way? Or how does one exist in an authentic human way? According to Kierkegaard, existence is above all something that has to be shaped. Humans must make themselves if they have to be themselves. This is man self-realization, which man cannot evade, for any devotion to evade is as impossible as evading one’s very self; the authentic self is self realization. Expatiating further, Kierkegaard says, the self cannot be itself unless it is correcting itself. So, the fact that people have to form themselves implies that human existence is a task which every authentic human must undertake. Therefore, human existence for Soren Kierkegaard is the possibility of man’s self-realization. In his view “for man to know himself is a cursor or an indicative of his existence and so a thinker who can forget all thinking that he is an existing individual will never explain his life” (Stanford Encyclopedia of philosophy–Soren Kierkegaard).

In this light, it can be asserted that Kierkegaard was fundamentally preoccupied with the fact that to exist humanly is to exist authentically. However, existing authentically does not come without challenges. In Kierkegaard presentation and analysis, these challenges can be termed “Human Existential Predicaments” or “Human Existential Situations”. Before we examine these predicaments that could effects man’s authentic existence, it is pertinent to present the life and works of this great intellectual giant.

**3.1. HIS LIFE AND WORKS**

An examination of the life and works of Soren Kierkegaard is not for history sake in itself rather for its fundamental relevance to crystallizing the foundation of Kierkegaard’s existential preoccupation.

**Birth:** Soren Kierkegaard was born on May 5th, 1813 in Copenhagen-Denmark. Soren was the last child and second of the two surviving children of the wealthy Michael Kierkegaard. Soren and his brother Peter were the only surviving out of Michael’s seven children. Soren born into the reformed Lutheran orientation of his father, his father was a deeply religious protestant, but his life was tortured by a morbid sense of guilt for all his moral failures. The result was that he gave his son a very stern, oppressive religious upbringing, which Kierkegaard later described as “crazy” (Lawhead 400).

**Education:** Although Kierkegaard father was wealthy, he was rather brought up stringently. He attended one of Copenhagen’s best schools, the School of Civil Virtue (Borgerdydskolen), for his classical education. At the age of seventeen, he entered Copenhagen University where he majored in Theology on his fathers’ request but later changed to Philosophy. He stood out at school because of his unfashionable appeared, plain and spindly stature. His teachers at the university include Poul Martin Moller, H. L. Martensen, and F. C. Sibborn. Moller and Sibborn were both philosophers who also wrote fiction. Sibborn in particular had a great influence on Kierkegaard philosophico-literary development. On the other hands, Martensen had a profound effect on Kierkegaard, largely in a negative manner. This is connected to Martensen’s championing role in Hegelianism; Kierkegaard published a vitriolic attack on Martensen’s theological works when Martensen was ordained Danish People’s Church Bishop Primate.

According to William Lawhead, as a university student, he “rebelled against the religious pressure of childhood…and worked hard at developing the reputation of being a happy-go-lucky, cultured, man-about-town” (400).

**Father/Son Reconciliation and the Sacrifice of Love (Regina Olsen)**

First, Kierkegaard reconciliation with his father before the latter death make him realized that stern religious upbringing giving him by his father was actually a loving attempt to prevent him from experiencing the guilt and melancholy his father had. Realizing this, Kierkegaard turned toward Christianity and began to understand the love of God. Secondly, in 1840, just before he enrolled at the Pastoral Seminary, met and fell in love, and became engaged with a teenage girl, Regina Olsen. This was a tortuous experience in Kierkegaard’s life. Kierkegaard was “passionately in love with her and yet felt that his melancholy personality would be like a lead weight that would dray her down” and that “he had a unique mission in life that would be subverted by the entangled of marriage and a normal, middle-class existence” (Lawhead 400).

Also, Kierkegaard felt that the wealth inherited from his was not really enough to support a wife, let alone a wife and children. He sought for disengagement and this process was long drawn and painful. He succeeded in breaking the engagement, left Copenhagen to Berlin, and abandoned permanently his pastoral sojourn. This event had a profound influence on Kierkegaard’s internal and external life. He had to face the difficult choices he must make in his life. To be false to himself and enter into a marriage which he believed was wrong, or to break his promise to a girl who loved him. This situation, Soren Kierkegaard discovered have presented a philosophical problem that the prevalent Hegelian philosophical system seemed unable to cope with.

Soren Kierkegaard’s ultimate justification for breaking off his engagement with Regina was his dedication to a life of writing as a religious poet, under the direction of divine governance. According to Kierkegaard, “the thing is to find a truth which is true for me, to find the idea for which I can live and die” (cited in Papinedu, 155). “As a measure of the importance the relationship to Olsen had for his life, Kierkegaard adopted a line from Virgil’s Aeneid 11, 3 as “a motto for part of his life’s suffering”: *Infandum me jubes Regina renovare dolorem* Queen [Regina],the sorrow you bid me revive is unspeakable”)” (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy–Soren Kierkegaard 1813-1855).

**Works:** Kierkegaard’s earlier writing (1843-1846) were written with pseudonymous authorship with series of authors with such strange names as Johannes Cliimacus, Johannes de Silentio and Anti-Climacus. His later writings (1946-1855) were written and authored by him. These works includes: The Journals, Either/Or: A Fragment of Life, Two Edifying Discourses, Fear and Trembling, Repetition, Philosophical Fragments, The Concept of Anxiety, Stages on Life’s Way, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, The Present Age, Edifying Discourses on Various Spirit, The Point of View of My Work As An Author, The Sickness Unto Death, Training in Christianity, God’s Unchangeability: A Discourse, etc.

**Death:** While Kierkegaard was still battling the Danish church, he suffered a stroke on October 2nd, 1855, partly paralyzed and in great pain. Admitted into Frederiksbery Hospital in Copenhagen where he finally died on November 11th, 1855.

**3.2 INDIVIDUALITY**

Kierkegaard points out that for an individual to live authentically, he must me capable of not being dictated by external forces or social conventions which he called “the crowd” or “the public”. In his work *The Present Age,* Kierkegaard criticizes the crowd for irresponsibility and lack of conscience, saying “a public is everything and nothing, the most dangerous of all powers and the most insignificant” (63). It shows that Kierkegaard was of the view that for people to actualize their authentic self, they must depart from the world of public and stands before God and face life each as an individual. F. Copleston captures Kierkegaard obsession for the crowd thus:

A crowd-not this crowd or that, the crowd not living or the crown long deceased, a crowd of humble people or of superior people of rich or of poor, etc–a crowd in its very concept is the untruth, by reason of the fact that it renders the individual completely impenitent and irresponsible, or at least weakens his sense of responsibility by reducing it to a fraction. (340).

Kierkegaard seems to say that authentic human existence is possible through individuality. So, can it be assert that the true task of an endeavour in humans life is becoming aware of one’s true self? And what are those criteria that can be used in this process of becoming? And if humans exist at a level that is less than authentic; how do one live authentically?

Flowing from the above questions, individuals can exist, for example, simply in terms of their immediate satisfaction of desires, pleasures, propensities, or distractions. This resulted in them gliding through life without direction or purpose. To have a direction, one must have a purpose that defines for him the meaning of his life. For Kierkegaard, an individual person, is a particular that no abstract formula or definition can capture, this includes the individual in ‘the crowd’ (or the public) and subsuming an individual being as a simply member of a species is a reduction of the true meaning of life for the authentic individuals. Modern society, for Kierkegaard also contributes to the dissolution of authentic human existence. According to Kierkegaard, “the production of the false idols of ‘the crowd’, diverts attention away from individuals to a mass public that loses itself in abstraction, communal dreams, and fantasies” (Wikipedia).

**3.2.1 Authentic Human Communication and the Community**

Kierkegaard points out the impossibility of authentic human communication existing as a community. Human life is basically individualistic, each person exist, make decision and act as individual. Because of this, it is impossible for one individual to perfectly understood and communicate with another individual basically in moments of profound personal experience. Humans as individuals are unique, but the question is: Is it possible for a unique individual to communicate authentically with others? This question is answered by Kierkegaard in question form. According to him; how does this question resonate with my own experiences or your own experience? Is there such a thing as the communicable distance of those closet and dearest to you? Why is it difficult for Abraham to communicate the nature of his mission to Sarah or Isaac? Does the grandeur as well as the tragedy of individual existence not come to a climax in the fact that in the end each individual not only make his or her decisions, but in the end each person has to die his or her own death?

Although Kierkegaard criticizes the crowd of distracting authentic individuality, it is indicative that he’s supportive of community life. Corroborating this fact, in his *Journals*, he writes “in community, the individual is crucial as the prior condition for forming a community… every individual in the community guarantees the community….” (126). Kierkegaard make it clear that authentic human existence is possible when each person stands alone in matters of decision and choice; before God and himself. The crowd is deceptive, irresponsible, insignificant and distractive. Hence, to exist authentically, one must be separated from crowd influence. Humans, although exist as a community of individuals still cannot communicate authentically. Therefore, the possibility of authentic human communication is not only a philosophical problem but also an existential nightmare.

**3.3 TRUTH AND SUBJECTIVITY**

When the question of truth is raised in an objective manner, reflection is directed objectively to the truth, as an object to which the knower is related…if only the object to which he is related is the truth, the subject is accounted to be truth. When the question of truth is raised subjectively, reflection is directed subjectively to the nature of the individual’s relationship; if only the mode of this relationship is the truth, the individual is the truth even if he should happen to be thus related to what is not true (Gardiner 97).

In the above quotation, Kierkegaard differentiated the modes of assessing a belief; the objective and the subjective. The objective emphasizes the “what”, whereas the subjective is concerned with the “how”. As far as human existence is concerned, Kierkegaard submits that, fundamental to man’s existence is the subjective one.

Truth in the human existential world is not objective quality existing independently of individuals. Existentially, truth is meaningful in relation to the existent being, and it is man that gives meaning to the idea of truth. Kierkegaard debunked the idea that man exist amorphously, universally and generically, rather that exists individually, in time, and faces decisions. Truth therefore is measure from the point of view of the individual. Truth, is expected to be judge “with all prudence…infinitely, personal, passionately interested manner…what is true…all depends on how they perceive the matter in their individual subjectivity.” (Ozumba 74). In his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, Kierkegaard defines truth as “an objective uncertainty held fast in an appropriation-process of the most passionate inwardness is the truth, the highest truth attainable for an existing individual” (182). This means, according to Ezedike (84) “the reality of every one’s existence proceeds thus from the “inwardness” of man, not from anything that the mind can codify”. Kierkegaard however did not denied the existence of any such thing as objectives, but that such objectified truth does not concern the existing individual as such. That is to say, “they are irrelevant to a man’s life of total self-commitment”. (Copleston 345). Thus, “no amount of objective, systematic, abstract knowledge could ever provide a meaning for life” (Soccio 413).

Subjectivity, in a very rough term, refers to what is personal to the individual; what makes an individual who he is in distinction from others. It is what the individual feels, makes, dreams, sees, thinks, measures, imagines, etc. However, Hegelian philosophy was of the assumption that the study of history can helped someone to have the knowledge of who really is an existing person. In Kierkegaard attack, Hegel’s disposition fell prey to such assumption. For Kierkegaard, “the individual comes to know who he is by an intensely personal and passionate pursuit of what will give meaning to his life. As an existing individual, who must come to terms with everyday life, overcome its obstacles and setbacks, who must live and die…” (Wikipedia). The individual has a live, that no one else will ever live, and in dealing with human existential predicaments or situations; the individual must encountered them with all his psycho-physical resources. In Socratic sense, the goal of human life is the examined life “man know thyself”. Knowing oneself means being aware of who one is, what one can be and what one cannot be. Using the Socratic idea, Kierkegaard asks one aiming to become a single individual the following questions in his book, *Edifying Discourses in Various Spirits.*

Everyone must make an accounting to God as an individual…lest anyone despondently think that he is not an individual, perhaps because in the busyness of the world he does not even have a name but is designated only by a number. What else, indeed, is the accounting of eternity than that the voice of conscience is installed eternally in its external right to be the only voice?....Are you now living in such a way that you are aware of being a single individual…are you living in such a way that this awareness can acquire the time and stillness and liberty to withdraw from life, from an honorable occupation, from a happy domestic life–on the contrary, that awareness will support and transfigure and illuminate your conduct in the relationship of life…(127-130).

Kierkegaard submits that, to exist in an authentic individual way is to exist subjectively. To objectified man existence is to alienate the individual. Thus, every man is an individual, subjective and self-centered, and his existence implies “being a certain kind of individual, an individual who strives, who considers alternatives, who chooses, who decides, and who above all commits himself” (Stumpf 462).

**3.4 DEATH**

Death, for Kierkegaard, is an existential predicament. Man no matter how he tries cannot evade the phenomenon of death. It comes when it must. Death cannot be avoided; it is man’s inevitability and is temporarily unpredictable. And to exist authentically and live passionately, individual needs to sincerely and intensely come to the realization of that fact. In other words, an authentic individual exist with the knowledge and realization of the fact that death is existential. Kierkegaard contends that, society have being in death-denials, they have live as if death will never come. Even though people see death all around them and grasp as an objective fact that everyone dies, few persons truly understand, subjectively and inwardly, that they will die someday. This implies that although people witnessed the occurrence of death, they still lack the subjective ingenuity to understand that death is man’s existential nightmare. That, it knocks at its preference and when it knocks, man cannot evade it power. So, to exist in an authentic way, this must be an individuals’ greatest knowledge.

In his *Three Edifying Discourses*, Kierkegaard summarizes the predicament of death thus:

We shall not decide which life fights the good fight most easily, but we all agree that every human being ought to fight the good fight, from which no one is shoot out, and yet this is so glorious that if it were granted only once to a past generation under exceptional circumstances-yes, what a description envy and discouragement would then know how to give: The difference is about the same as that in connection with the thought of death. As soon as a human being is born, he begins to die. But the difference is that there are some people for whom the thought of death comes into existence with birth and is presented to them in the quit peacefulness of childhood and the buoyancy of youths; whereas others have a period in which this thought is not present to them until, when the years ran out, the years of vigor and vitality, the thought of death meets them on their way. Who, now is going to decide which life was easier, whether it was the life of those who continually lived with a certain reserve because the thought of death was present to them or the life of those who so abandoned themselves to life that they almost forgot the existence of death? (280).

From the above quotation, Kierkegaard has shown that death begins at birth. But the little differences are that, some experience death at childhood, some at youth and some at old age. Hence, one still has to decide which life was worth living: Is it the one who lived with the reality of his own death? Or one who pleasurably lived ignorance of the reality of his own death? For Kierkegaard, however, whereas the existing individual is essentially eternal, temporal by virtue of his existing, his existential security is shaken, most profoundly by the reality of death, which at it likeable moment, may terminate his individual earthly existence.

**3.5 DREAD OR ANXIETY**

The concept of dread is conspicuous to the writing of the existentialists. It use has been differently used by different scholars. But, for Kierkegaard, dread is closely related to the idea of sin. However, in Copleston (348) sense, “one can…broaden the range of application and say that dread is a state which precedes a qualitative leap from one stage in life’s way to another”. According to Kierkegaard, man in his existential uncertainty experiences dread; this can come in two forms, objective and subjective form. The crowd influence upon the individual’s response to such influence upon the individual is the objectives dread, whereas, the individual’s response to such influence is the subjective dread. Dread is an unfocused fear, it is not feared per se, whereas, dread have no relation to definite thing; fear is fear of something definite.

In concrete terms, dread is man’s self possibilities and saws freedom. Dread awakes the existing individual in regard to the next day, the anxiety towards the next day. Corroborating this fact, Taylor (221) opines that “we want the future to come if our dream will come true. However we may fail, this possibility of failure is the source of dread”. Substantiating this fact, Ozumba (77) writes “dread is the anxious possibility of being unable. Kierkegaard calls it “the nothingness of possibility” (anything can happen). And is related to present, future possibility, freedom and the consequence of decisions for the future”. Dread lead the existential person to a future into which he can authentically live. However, the uncertainties of the future bring about the phenomenon of repulsion and attraction.

In Kierkegaard’s exposition, man as a being is a being in dread, a being not wanting to be yet he is destined to be. And the “only shelter offered him are those built upon intellectual commitments, organization and manipulation of democratic, industrial and mass society” (Niebet 147). In his *Concept of Dread*, Kierkegaard posits that, man rationality nor consciousness does not influence him formatively. He writes:

The formative influence in man is found not in his rationality nor in his consciousness, nor in his sense of God, or in his community relationships, but in an insinuating dread, which as the vertigo of freedom accompanies all his activity as prior and controlling factor (63).

Dread in Kierkegaard’s definition is a “sympathetic antipathy and an antipathetic sympathy” (138). And “the possibility of freedom” (139). The possibility to do what he does not know.

Expatiating further, Kierkegaard says, anxiety (as the term can also be used) can be compares to dizziness. That, individuals who tend to look down into the yawning, abyss becomes dizzy. And that, this is because just as much in hi s own eye as in the abyss, for suppose he had not looked down. Anxiety, therefore, 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. Illustrating on Adam’s encounters with God, Kierkegaard says, anxiety precedes sin; anxiety is the presupposition for hereditary sin and its leads man to sin. Man been anxious to know what he used not to know falls into. This possibility of freedom to know, to approach the future, to invent the self, to distinguished good from evil is thus, the possibility of sin.

However, dread or anxiety, for Kierkegaard is a way for man to be served. It informs man of his choices, his self-awareness and personal responsibility, and brings him from a state of unself-conscious immediacy to self-conscious reflection. Authentic human existence presupposes the possible experience of dread. Although, it may be the possibility of sin, it can also be a recognition or realization of one’s true self and freedoms. Freedom for the sinful man is for him the object of a sympathetic antipathy and an antipathetic sympathy. To overcome this existential predicament, man must leap into the unknown (a leap of faith). This leap means salvation for the individual, not destruction. As Kierkegaard maintains “the dread of possibility holds him as its prey, until it can deliver him saved into the hands of faith. In no other place does he find repose…” (141). This seem in the word of F. Copleston to imply that “dread is overcome by the leap. But in so far at least as the maintenance of the standpoint of faith involves a repeated self-commitment to an objective uncertainty, it would appear that dread recurs as the emotive tonality of the repeated leap” (350).

**3.6 DESPAIR**

Despair is human’s existential predicament, it is a fundamental condition to man. Despair, according to Kierkegaard is “a symptom of man in the wrong. It is frustrating and insinuating, unappeasable; it coils and uncoils behind consciousness. It arises from the discouragement of the personality” (Uka 105). This implies that, despair come within the individual internal self, not from external fate or fortune. It has nothing to do with physical illness and mortality; its locus is the self, hence the sickness into death. Despair, as Etim (177) writes is “an anxious dread of an unknown something or of something he does not even dare to make acquaintance with…it is the sickness into death, with its agony consisting in not being able to die”. Conditional to man, is the predicament of despair. Despairing individual experiences a time in which his personal Happiness in return for his efforts never comes. To despair is “an attempt to live in such a way as to suggest that one is not actually living, it is really an attempt to achieve a state of living” (Uka 105). Essential to the individual, Kierkegaard says they come in basic forms namely: (a) despair at not willing to be oneself, and (b) despair at willing to be oneself. And the third form (c) despair at not being conscious of having a self falls below the reflection level. However, for Kierkegaard, immediate happiness of the aesthetic man is the most attractive home of despair. This inauthentic man despaired because his enjoyments depend on accidental circumstances. His existential conditions depend on chances. Despair “is the inevitable result of the *individual’s* having to confront momentous concrete ethical and religious dilemmas as an *individual*. It is the result of the individual’s having to make, *for himself and alone,* choices of lasting significance” ( Moore and Bruder 160). Terribly, the existential price for man existence as a conscious being is the feeling of despair. However, according to Etim (178) “it is not morbid for it is our experience of freedom. Rather, it is something for human beings to discover”.

As examined above, despair is internal to man; it is not dictated by external forces. But “man in despair usually regards himself as a victim of external circumstances, but when he recognizes that the trouble is internal, he only intensifies his predicament if he tries to cure himself” (Roberts 117). These imply that, despair is conditional to man, and man’s consciousness of being despair presupposes his authentic living.

**3.7 THE QUESTION OF FREEDOM AND CHOICE**

Kierkegaard points out that human freedom in existence imply freedom to make decision and act upon it. In his explanations, humans do possibly go through life without exercising their freedom and the power of choices. They can make choices of what to drink, to eat, to wear; who to communicate with; where to live; who to marry; which car to drive, but upon all these choices, the person still has not yet chosen if he or she has not chosen himself or herself; what kind of a person to be, and what kind of life to lives! An examination of this indicates that authentic human existence means a continual freedom to choose and a repeated commitment to a purpose or direction in life. Furthermore, Kierkegaard establishes the fundamental idea that each person exists and has a limited amount of time to choose and to make the decisions which matter so much to him. Human existence, as ‘a short time’, each person has urgent decisions to make and has the freedom to make them. However, this “freedom may be the source of a person’s anguish, as there can be found no certainty which these choices are made” (Wild 41).

Concerning religion and the question to make free choices, Kierkegaard view that religion does not disrupt man’s personal freedom, rather it can only be determined by each individual through the ‘leap of faith’. Man is at liberty to choose what to believe and what not to believe; to decide what exist and what does not exist. Possibly man must risk his faith to believes in the eternal. Kierkegaard writes “when a concrete individual lacks faith, then neither does God exist, nor is God present, albeit God, eternally understood, is eternal” (Wiener, 192). Adam’s personal choice is said to have necessitated individual sin, rather far Kierkegaard, the Adamic story is symbolic of what happens in the experiences of every man. Each man is a mixture of bondage and responsibility. Hence, to choose according to the crowd is an injustice to freedom, and individual freedom is an injustice to the fateful influence of social conditioning. Does Kierkegaard try to give a chronological explanation of how the individual makes the transition from innocence to quit? No! He is only trying to show how anxiety accompanies freedom even prior to moral distinctions. What does he mean by freedom even prior to moral distinction? He means:

A condition of sheer possibility–the possibility of making something out if nothing…Freedom means that we have a hand in making ourselves what we are to become, but it is also means that we can negate as we affirm, we can destroy as well as construct. Freedom means that man have kinship with nothingness as well as with God (Roberts 73-74).

From this examination, it shows that authentic human existence is to make free choices. But it must be noted that what one choice in crucial moments is of no important as how one chooses it. When making significant choices, one must choose passionately, with energy and conscious of the significant consequences of such choices. Supporting this assertion, Kierkegaard in his *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life* write thus: “…in making a choice it is not so much a question of choosing the right as of the energy, the earnestness, the pathos with which one chooses….” (141). With this unfettered freedom, James Collins concludes that “men give different interpretations of their modes of existing, and they use the common human terms to express different scales of Value” (72). However, Kierkegaard does not say individuals in their choices do not make wrong choices, rather he contends that “if people choose earnestly and passionately, they will know when they have made a wrong choice and will be able to get back on the right track” ( Velasquez 180-181).

**3.8 THE QUEST FOR MEANING**

Personally, Kierkegaard was in constant search for the meaning of his existence. He desire to realize the purpose and direction which could give shape and meaning to his life. This desire constantly commits him to a truth that he could be ready to live for or to die for. His own experience of despair, emptiness, melancholy, hedonistic lifestyle awakes in him the quest to find meaning only not for his personal existence, but also for the meaningful of human existence. Supporting this view, Kierkegaard writes in his *Journal* thus:

What I really need is to get clear about what I must do, not what I must know, except in so far as knowledge must precedes every act. What matters is to find a purpose, to see what is really is that God wills that I shall do; the crucial thing is to find the truth which is truth for me, to find the idea for which I am willing to live and die…(34).

For Kierkegaard, meaning is a lived experience, a quest to find one’s values, beliefs and purpose in a meaningless world. Personally, as a Christian, meaning of human existence is rooted in God’s word. For the non-Christian, however, Kierkegaard believes they are entitled to their freedom to find meaning for their own existence. Kierkegaard idea in this ultimate search for meaning is that one’s life is meaningful, authentic, and worth living only if he believes genuinely and passionately in the Christian God which is possible through a leap over the confines of common sense and pure reason. This means, to exist in a meaningful, authentic and worthwhile way, reason and common sense is not a prerequisite, rather one ought to risk his belief for the Absolute. This can sound absurd, but the question is: Why is it imperative for humans to take a leap in Christian faith even if it is absurd? Kierkegaard answer is simply because “it is the only adequate source of the kind of meaning a human being has to have to keep on going with a sense that life is worthwhile” ( Internet Encyclopepia of Philosophy-Soren Kierkegaard 1813-1855).

**3.9 STAGES ON LIFE’S WAY**

Kierkegaard stages of human existence can be schematized in connection to the question of freedom. The aesthetic existence means man’s immediate continuity with nature and feeling before any moral distinctions are attempted. Man, unable to succeed in this stage, becomes demonic if he tries. Then, leap to the ethical stage which terminate at the religious stage; the religious stage then offers man the possibility for an authentic existence. In E. F. Roberts words “man reaches the peace of continuity…on the other side of moral conflict, and he also reaches the fruition of personal responsibility within the context of collective guilt and salvation” (67). For Kierkegaard, man can exist at any one of the three stages, but soon realize that there are modes of human existence, that is more authentic than others. Arriving at authentic existence is not “a matter of the intellect but that of faith and commitment, a continuous process of choice by the existing individual in the pressure of varieties of either/or” (Stumpt 467). This means that every individual is faced with the option of choosing between three categories of existence, which he also calls “views of life”, “existential categories”, existence spheres, and “stages on life’s way”.

Each stage is a life way, they are ways of living out one’s existence. These stages are intertwined; one can only transit from one stage to another through a leap. This transition is not a neutral follow-on from the proceeding stage, rather a complete negation of it. Let now examine these stages closely.

**3.9.1 The Aesthetic Stage:** This is the first stage on life’s way. At this stage, the individual is governed by sense, impulse and emotion. He is always in continual search for satisfaction; basked for sensual pleasures and romantically enjoys work of arts and literature. Boring and interesting are what defined his existence. To him, “life is a frantic attempt to avoid boredom by filling one’s plate with ever-new interesting experience”. To the aesthetic man, there is a point of departure from Rene Descartes’ “cogito ergo sum” (“I think, therefore I am”) to the position that “I have interesting moments, therefore I am” ( Lawhead 408). His pleasures are however, threatened by boredom, which strikes when the aesthetic feels life is pleasurable and fully lived, fading away all the beautiful things he enjoys and living the aesthetic individual with an inner emptiness. It also comes in form of repetition where man’s excessive pleasures eventually lead him to tiresome, stale and dissatisfaction.

The aesthetic existence is typified by Don Juan whose passion tends toward lustful moments, which as soon as they are attained, become shallow and empty and dissolve themselves into nothingness. Inwardly, he is despaired; he finally realizes that there is no remedy, no salvation, at the sphere which he stands. He is therefore, faced, with two alternatives. Either he should remain in despair on the aesthetic level or he should make the transition to the next stage. This transition is an act of choice, a self commitment, according to Copleston (342) “mere thinking will not do the trick for him. It is a question of choice; either-or”. At this point, being unable to make a choice is being unable to reach authentic selfhood and true existence. Summarily, Obinayan (5) writes that “the aesthetic man avoids responsibilities and makes arbitrariness into an art for an unending amusement”. However, the boredom, melancholy, despairs and shipwreck of the aesthetic existence signals the emergence of the ethical life.

**3.9.2 The Ethical Stage:** The ethical stage is the second in human sphere of life. At this stage, the individual exercises his freedom of choice; these choices are not all morally rights choices. At this stage, the individual is faced with two alternatives of choice; a choice to choose evil and a choice to choose the good. Hence, man in his quest to exist authentically, has to make significant choices; choices that is devoid of the fragmentary impulses of the aesthetic existence which he called the “possibility of gaining a history”. Although his life may be characterize by passion, such passion differs from the whimsical longing of the aesthetic man, rather, in W. Lawhead words “a care about something with all one’s being; to embrace the motivating values that one uses consciously to guide one’s life” (410).

Still on the question of choice, Kierkegaard says, it is at this stage that the individual can easily make choice, a choice of what to be, or becomes, hence, he chooses freedom and by doing so he chooses himself. In the volume II of his *Either/Or,* Kierkegaard writes “the individual becomes conscious of himself as the definite individual. With these talents, these dispositions, these instincts, these passions, influenced by these definite surroundings he assumes responsibility….” (225).

In this sphere, man realizes his life obligations; he strives to combine this individuality with universality. He understands that his duty arises from the inner necessity bound by obligation. He lived his life to the universal norms; the ethical principles. His decisions are not related to God, but by good moral conduct. At this stage, according to Lawhead (410), “sin or moral failure is thought of as simply a human weakness that can be overcome through strength of will and a clearer intellectual understanding of the moral good”. For Kierkegaard, though, the ethical individual strives toward authentic existence; such goal is not fully attained yet. Describing human existence in this category, Kierkegaard in *The Sickness Unto Death* writes:

Outwardly he is completely “a real man”. He is a university man, husband and father, an uncommonly competent civil functionary even, a respectable father, very gentle to his wife and carefulness itself with respect to his children. And a Christian? Well, yes, he is that too after a sort (197).

While the life of Don Juan is the metaphor of the aesthetic man, Socrates is the metaphor of the ethical, who denounces sensual pleasures and satisfaction in favour of the universal law of reason. The ethical stage produces according to Kierkegaard the ‘Tragic Hero’, who renounces himself in expression of the universal, conceptually seen in the life of Socrates.

At this stage, man is faced with the failure to achieved self-fulfillment. Sin entered and corrupts the ethical mind. Just as ‘despair’ forms the antithesis of the aesthetic consciousness; the consciousness of sin, the consciousness to resolved or overcome by ethical self-commitment forms the antithesis to the ethical stage. In this frustration and weakness, the individual can only be saved by faith, a leap into the religious sphere. Substantiating this fact, Copleston (343) writes, “and this antithesis is overcome only by the act of faith, by relating oneself to God”.

**3.9.3 The Religious Stage:** The religious stage culminates Kierkegaard’s stages of human existence. It is at this stage that the existing person discovers the meaning of authentic existence. The existence of this stage does not mean adopting certain religious beliefs or doctrines, rather it is nothing less than an encounter with God. Here, the existing person obtain the true sense of himself and realizes his authenticity only when he stands alone before God. In his book, *The Sickness Unto Death* Kierkegaard maintains that “the more conception of God, the more self; the more self, the more conception of God” (211). This means, the more an individual stand or relate with God, the more he realize his authentic self and an authentic human existence supposes man’s solemn position and relationship with God.

The aesthetic existence is exemplified by Don Juan, the ethical by Socrates, whereas the religious existence is exemplified by Abraham. In his book, *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard make sharp distinctions between the Socrates life (the ethical) and the Abraham existence (the religious), by presenting the biblical story of Abraham, where Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his only son Isaac at God’s instruction. Whereas, the tragic hero (Socrates), sacrifices himself for the universal moral law; Abraham suspends the universal for the religious. This act, Kierkegaard refers to as a “teleological suspension of the ethical”. That is, his universal obligation was suspended for the sake of a higher goal, namely his personal relationship to the Maker. Abraham, as Kierkegaard puts it, does nothing for the universal. In his analysis, “so we stand in the presence of the Paradox. Either the Individual as the Individual can stand in an absolute relation to the Absolute, and then ethics is not supreme, or Abraham is lost; he is neither a tragic hero nor an aesthetic hero” (71). Kierkegaard does not intend to infer that religion negates morality, rather he intend to enunciate that the “Knights of Faith” (such as Abraham) is directly related to his God whose demands are absolute and cannot be measured simply by the standards of the human reason. In other words, human personal relationship to God is a higher priority than a rationally based universal ethics.

At the religious stage, man has reached his authentic self, a new life of faith in God. He has chosen himself and therefore redeemed himself to himself through the “leap of faith”, his existence is without despair, he is free and happy. Now, man has become the “knight of faith”, and not the “tragic hero”, and his authentic existence is inescapably related to God which he must obey and trust absolutely.

**WORKS CITED**

Collins, J. *Three Paths in Philosophy*. Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1962.

Copleston, F. A. History of Philosophy. Vol. VII Fichte to Nietzche. London: Burns and Oates Limited, 1968.

Edim, O. O. “Existentialism” in I. I. Asouzu (ed.). Philosophy and Logic Today. Calabar: Africa Pacific and Allied Press, 2002.

Etim, Cyril “Contemporary Movements in Philosophy” In­ Udo Etuk and I. Esikot (Eds.) Philosophy and Human Existence. Uyo: Robertminder International Ltd, 2013.

Ezedike, E. U. “Kierkegaard’s Existentialism: An Exposition” In G. O. Ozumba, M. Uka on Phenomenology and Existentialism. Calabar: Jochrisam Publishers, 2010.

Gardiner, P. L. Kierkegaard. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Kierkegaard Soren. Concluding Inscientific Postscript. D. F. Swenson and W. Lowrie (Trans.) Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Edifying Discuses in Various Spirit. H. Hong and E. Hong (Trans.). Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Either/Or Vol. 1 W. Lowrie (Trans.) Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Either/Or: The Fragment of Life. Vol. 2 D. F. Swenson and L. M. Swenson (Trans.). Princeton: Princeton University press, 1968.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Fear and Trembling W. Lawrie (Trans) Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Papers and Journals. A. Hannay (Trans.) London: Penguin Books, 1996.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ The Concept of Dread. W. Lawrie (Trans) London: Princeton University Press, 1944.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ The Present Age. New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1962.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ The Sickness Unto Death. W. Lawrie (Trans.)k New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968.

Lawhead, W. F. The Voyage of Discovery: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy. 2nd Ed. Belmart: Wadsworth Groups, 2002.

Niebet, L. The Social philosophers. New York: Washington Square Press, 1973.

Ozumba, G. O. Kierkegaard’s Existentialism and its Relevance to the Nigerian Situation In G. O. Ozumba, M. Uka and T. E. Ogar (Eds.) Critical Essays on Phenomenology and Existentialism. Calabar: Jochrisan Publishers, 2010.

Roberts, David F. Existentialism and Religious Belief. Massachusetts: Continuum, 1957.

Stumpt, E. S. Philosophy: History and Problems. New York: McGraw-Hill Books Company, 1977.

Taylor, M. C. Kierkegaard’s Pseudonymous Authorship. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1975.

Uka, Michael “Existentialism of Soren Kierkegaard” In G. O. Ozumba, M. Uka and T. E. Ogar (Eds.). Critical Essays on Phenomenology and Existentialism. Calabar: Jochrisam Publishers, 2010.

Wiener, P. P. (Ed) Vol. 2. Dictionary of the History of Ideas. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973.

Wild, John. The Challenge of Existentialism Bloomington: Indiona University Press, 1955.

“Philosophy of Soren Kierkegaard” Wikipedia Retrieved July 25, 2015 from <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/?title=philosophy-of-s%c3%B8ren=kierkegaard>

“Soren Kierkegaard (1813 – 1855) “Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Retrieved July 25, 2015 from <http://www.iep.utm.edu/kierkegaard>

“Soren Kierkegaard” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Retrieved July 25, 2015 from <http://plato.standford.edu/entries/kierkegaard>

Obinyan, V. E. “Nature of Human Existence in Kierkegaard’s Ethical Philosophy: A Step towards Self-Valuation and Transformation in Our Contemporary World”. *International Journal of Philosophy* Vol.2, No. 1 2014, 1-14. <http://www.sciencepublishinggroup.com/j/isp/doc:10.11648/j.ijp.20140201.11>

Velasquiz, M. Philosophy: A text with readings 11th Ed. New York: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2011.

Kierkegaard, S. Three Edifying Discourse. H. Hong and E. Hong (Trans.) Princeton: Princeton University Press.

**CHAPTER FOUR**

**EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION**

**4.1 EVALUATION**

Critically, Soren Kierkegaard’s notion of human existence being a philosophical endeavour has attracted criticisms both from the point of view of it strengths and from the point of view of it weaknesses. Philosophically, Kierkegaard can be criticized for his theistic portrayal of the human nature, that is, notion of human existence is highly built on theological foundation than of philosophy. His too much emphasis on individuality portrays him and the existing individual as selfish individuals who think about themselves alone. Kierkegaard portrayal of man in realization of his authentic self sees man as selfish and egoistic being who strives toward that which only concerns him and care less or nothing about that which concerns others. His attacks on the crowd seem to isolate man and set the individual against the crowd in which he belongs. From Aristotelian sense, this is faulty, because only a beast or God can exist solitarily not the individual. For the simple reason that man is both ‘homo politico’ (a political animal) and ‘homo socio’ (a social animal), an individual cannot afford to exist solitarily without his fellows which make up the crowd.

From this standpoint, Jose Ortega Casset warned that man is what the world invites him to be and the basic features of our lives are impressed upon it by the form of its surroundings as in a mould. Man therefore is naturally inclined to the world. So, if Kierkegaard want us to believe that crowd which is a conglomeration of school, family, church, social association etc, alienate and in-authenticate the individual, why then did God whom man must make a leap to in order to live his authentic self, find it good and worthy to make for man a partner? ”And the Lord God said, it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.’’ Gen. 2:18

From an epistemic standpoint, another problem discovered from Kierkegaard’s idea of authentic human self as one who exist subjectively, is his over bearing criticism on the rational power of man to be objectified. It can be argued that man without rationality tend to lead wayward life; man with his sense of pure reason and focused rationality can equip himself with all that is required to find and create meaning for his existence. Attacking Kierkegaard situation of the individual as a subjective being, Ozumba (87) argues that “If all men are to act on purely subjective grounds, there will be no education, no system of morals, no organized religion, no government and no philosophy’’.

On another point, Kierkegaard’s idea seems not applicable to everyone. A critical examination of his idea seems to imply that to exist authentically is directly tied to the religious learning of protestant Christianity. But he failed to tell us what the Buddhists, the Hindus, the Taoists; Muslims etc have to leap to in order to authenticate their existence. Or do they have to leap to the Christian God? From this standpoint, Kierkegaard does not inquire into the authenticity of human existence as a whole, but he preaches Christianity. Based on his Protestant background and adherence to Luther’s doctrinal teaching of faith, he implies that authentic human existence is necessarily tight to the Christian faith. This is rather theological and un-philosophical. Again, it remained to be seen whether Kierkegaard had to answers the question about the possibility of faith without reason. Can faith be possible without reason? To us, they seem to be complementary. Philosophically speaking, one’s faith can only be based on reason. In other words, one cannot have faith on something without a concrete reason for such faith. Ezedike has argued that Kierkegaard’s notion of human existence “appears to be a passionate reaction to the dark side of human existence but it fails to offer anything of cognitive values.” (91)

Apart from that, it also calls to questions Kierkegaard’s explanations of the dialectical transitions from the aesthetic sphere to the religious stage. This transition seems to be watertight, and it can be asked: Can one not transit from the aesthetic to the religious without necessarily undergoing the ethical? In his criticism, Levinas argued that the leap of faith; the suspension of the ethical and the leap into the religious is a type of violence. According to Levinas (cited in Lippitt, 136) “Kierkegaard’s violence begins when existence is forced to abandon the ethical stage in order to embark on the religious stage….” Levinas argument is based on the fact that, man authentic existence lies at the religious stage, then Kierkegaard’s Abraham story seems to have some fault. For him, since man was to obey the commands of his Creator absolutely, and if Abraham was truly in the religious stage, as he claims, he would not have listened to the Angel’s command and should have continued to kill Isaac. So “transcending ethics” seems like a loophole to excuse would-be murders from crime and thus is unacceptable. However, the search for meaning of human existence is one of the most powerful human propensities; Kierkegaard invokes God as the ultimate source of authentic existence. And it would seem that the purposes of the Supernatural Being could affect the human struggle for a meaningful and authentic existence

However, despite these weaknesses examined from Kierkegaard view on human existence. It is to be noted that Kierkegaard’s existential thought has provided a great insight to human authentic existence and personal freedom as an existing individual. Kierkegaard’s conception that he ‘who follows the crowd’ and does not choose his or her own identity and live passionately as an individual cannot even be said to really exist.” (Cited in Solomon et al 313).

Supporting Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger asserts that humans only become authentic when they detach themselves from the crowd. They exist passionately when they take hold of themselves as individuals and find “authentic” selves. In Lawhead critique of Kierkegaardian view, his idea had a big influence in psychological research. In other words, psychologists find Kierkegaard’s notion that persons are self-creating beings, that alienation from one’s self is man greatest malady, and personal authenticity is the route to mental wholeness as psychologically interesting. Hence, Kierkegaard had enormous influence on secular writers such as Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus. Either directly or indirectly, Kierkegaard significantly influenced twentieth century artists, novelists, poets, existentialists and theologians.

We would like to contend that Kierkegaard’s exposition is, to some extent, edification to human existence. It edifies us, encourages us and engages us to become more conscious of the extent to which we exist, as opposed to merely living. Kierkegaard’s great virtue lies in his reclamation of the existing individual from philosophical, political, social, theological, and scientific abstraction as he struggles to make life meaningful amidst a bombardment of answers and options. His critiques of Hegelian philosophy and abstract reasoning reminds us that individuals construct philosophies, individuals interpret revelations, individuals draw scientific conclusions, individuals decide what is objective, make their choices and act upon them. To some extent, Kierkegaard is right to say that to exist, authenticity and passionately is only possible if one exists as an individual detached from the crowd, makes his choices subjectively and find solace when he encounters God.

**4.2 CONCLUSION**

From our examination of Kierkegaard’s analysis and exposition of human existence, each person faces the choice of choosing between three fundamental kinds of self-actualization namely, the aesthetic, ethical and religious. It can be pointed out that his notion purges up the question: what does it mean to be existing as an authentic human person? An answer to his fundamental question places one in a better position in which he can realize himself and live truly authentic in the world. Kierkegaard has shown that, man in existent has nearly forgotten what concerns him as a human person and his existential predicaments seem unknown. This can be attributed to the contributory influence of science and man’s over-confidence in reductionism. Kierkegaard has truly proven that the importance to be individual takes a great importance as a way of orienting human life towards authenticity. Moreover, his emphasize on the importance of choice is indispensable toward authentic existence. Consequently, what constitutes our decisions is a fact we must all realize. Man cannot depend on systems of laws and social conventions alone as a decisive instruction for his life choices; every choice has to flow from his personal appropriation. In fact, to exist authentically, man must bear in mind that being in existent involves decisions that transcend the realm of moral and conventional laws. Every person must always realize that death, dread, despair are characteristics of the existence of man. Following his analysis on life stages, man must always ask himself what ought I to do? He must disentangle himself from sensual and intellectual pleasure which could lead him to boredom and suicide. Since, neither aesthetic nor ethical life can authenticate our existence; a leap is a necessity, highly significant. And we must be open to a teleological suspension of the ethical. In other words, moral laws and habit have to be set aside in response to the divine command. Based on this fact, it can be said that human existence will be meaningful if man realizes his purpose of existence, detaches himself from the crowd, embraces subjectivity and reflects on his life as an individual and relates personally with his Creator (God).

We have clearly seen that the possibility of authentic human existence lies in only one direction, a direction that man must live his own existence solely as an individual; an individual who is free to take his decisions, acts upon it and consequently be a direct respondent to the outcome of such actions. In making specific recommendations to Kierkegaard’s thought on authentic human existence as it affect the contemporary man. First, the research recommended that, there should be a clear and absolute departure from the way individuals’ perceived their own existence. Individuals must see their existence as a concretely existing subject for whom the journey to truly meaningful living involves a transformation of their being. Secondly, laws which emphasis existence as something to be striven for by each individual through their choice, values and actions which are particular to their own life should be promulgated. With this in mine, the individual would be protected in living out his existence as particularly to him, not necessarily universal laws that served to alienate the individual. Third, contemporary man must realize that death being natural is also an existential phenomenon. So, to realize authentic selfhood, it is recommended that man in his daily living must lived to is best; man must not be too anxious about the next day (the future) to avoid the possibility of falling into sin. For the Holy Book had even warned that we should not be worried about tomorrow, for tomorrow will take care of itself. From this premise, every person is encourage to live conscious of being despair, the dangers of dread and the inevitability of death. Fourthly, the work also recommended that, individuals in their choices of action must not be compelled to act particularly as it concerns them. For to realize one authentic self, individual’s freedom of choices is a fact that cannot be denied. Universal and conventional laws to an extent deprived man of his authenticity. Although it can still be observed but each person must be allowed in time of ethical conflicts to make his own decisions and lived by it. Fifthly, since living too satisfactorily, sensually, and emotional always led to boredom and suicide (inauthentic self) according to Kierkegaard, man must strive towards the Absolute. Also since ethics sometimes conflict our personal appropriation and convert us to merely follow conventions, we must then strive beyond the ethical; we must always remember that we owes as a duty to fulfill authentic selfhood with solemn, sincere and absolute dedication to our Maker.

Lastly, the work highly recommended that Kierkegaard’s thought though was lay down century ago still served as an epistemic and practical grounding for contemporary man to self-reflect and consciously authenticate his existence. Even though, man by nature of his existence is a social being, he must not allow social influence to negate, alienate or corrupt his selfhood. He must note that despite of himself existing with others, he has his own decisions to make; his own life to live and importantly his own death to die. So, living merely as others is alien and evil every individual most avoid. To his end, *Kierkegaard’s Notion of Human Existence has* served as a panacea for contemporary man to self-reflect and consciously life his authentic and meaningful life.

It can be concluded that Soren Kierkegaard’s Notion of Human Existence become relevant as it tries to awaken the existential being to the need to self-consciously reflect positively on his human action in this world of struggle and fundamental challenges. In a world where the ‘crowd’ is the theological, axiological and epistemic foundation for actions, a world where authentic or subjective human existence is being objectified, a world where morals seem to irritate people, a world where the call of holiness is ignored and the content of individuality, subjectivity, death, dread, despair, freedom and choice, meaning is misunderstood amidst an immeasurable community life. Soren Kierkegaard’s Notion of HumanExistence have sensibly lead us to the understanding and positive reflection of St. Augustine Maxim that ‘God had created man, but man’s soul shall never rest until it rests in God’. Thus, man as an existential being must always strive toward the truth which is true for him, an idea for which he can live or die.

**REFERENCES**

Bench, D.A. (1975) The management of people at work. Macmillan Company.

Edgar, F. Huge (1980) Organizational Development and Change, Second edition.

Flipo, (1960) Personal Management

Geoffrey Moorhead (1995) Organizational behaviour, Fourth edition.

Geoffrey, N. Igboeli (1990) Management a Functional Approach, First edition.

Irwin, Series (1977) Management and Behavioural Science.

Memhard and Rin (1990) Organizational Changes, Fifth edition, pg. 380.

Nwanna, L.E. (1996) Organizational Behaviour

Perrow (1967) A frame work for the Comparative Analysis of Organization, American Sociological Review.

Richard, M. Steers (1991) Introduction to Organizational Behaviour, Fourth edition.

Richard, (1993) Organizational Behaviour, Fifth edition.

Schein, (1990) Organizational Change, second edition.

Stays, (1991) Organizational Development and Change, second edition.

Thompson, J.D. (1967) Organization in action, New York McGraw-Hill Inc.

Ugonwenyi, W.N.O. (1995) Principles of Development Administration Awka Fountain Publishers Nigeria.