

Philosophy and Religion: Tools to Curbing Terrorism and Improving Development

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Abstract: In the midst of the turbulent moments in the contemporary society, a discourse on Religion, Terrorism and Development is appropriate, especially when using Philosophy as a vehicle for this purpose. Great philosophers had made great contributions in Religion, whose ideas cut across various strata of human enterprise. The religious ideas of the great 1813 Danish existential philosopher, Soren Aabye Kierkegaard will be an enabling tool to succinctly assess the perspectives of Religion, Terrorism and Development having Nigeria as a case study. This is so because, of the problems of the contemporary time, particularly in Nigeria such as religious bigotry, terrorism and sluggish developmental processes. This academic piece haven discovered these problems, intends addressing it by suggesting ways of solving it. The genuine intent of this article it is, to solving these problems using the academic method of textual analysis. Being mindful of these contemporary problems, especially in Nigeria, this article wishes to establish that the religious ideas of Kierkegaard can proffer antidotes to the prevailing contemporary Nigerian problems. The optimism of this academic work it is that, the application of the religious ideas of Kierkegaard in the modern society particularly Nigeria, haven achieved its set goals establishes a serene, calm, and united society. It is for this purpose that Philosophy and Religion is gleaned.

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1. THE PARADOX OF INCARNATION

In his religious thoughts and writings, Kierkegaard saw himself as a missionary whose task was to reintroduce Christianity into Christendom. He deliberately played up supernatural character of Christianity and its demand for a radical choice between good and evil. Kierkegaard saw the incarnation as the absolute paradox which appears as an absurdity, contradiction or offense to the reason. A would-be Christian must therefore endure the crucifixion of the understanding. Truth is realised by the one who in truth has given up his or her understanding and believes against the understanding. Another characteristic of subjectivity is the notion of paradox. In Kierkegaard's work, *postscript*, subjective truth involves belief in the face of the absurd. Belief in the absurd comes about if what one holds to be true is a paradox. Here there is a contradiction in the relations between infinite passion and the objective uncertainty. According to Kierkegaard in his work, *Either/Or*,

Faith is precisely the contradiction between the infinite passion of the individual's inwardness and the objective uncertainty because, paradox involves a seeming contradiction, the absurdity if such a thing is a primary example of holding to a truth subjectively.¹

This means that there is no other way one can hold to a truth of this kind, one must acknowledge that holding to the truth of a seemingly logical contradiction would obviously have to be held subjectively, it cannot be held objectively. Again James Valone in his book, *The Ethics and Existentialism of Kierkegaard*, interpreting this position asserts,

Christianity is subjective, the inwardness of faith in the believer constitutes the truth's eternal decision. And objectively there is no truth for an objective knowledge of the truth of Christianity or its truth is precisely untruth²

For Kierkegaard, the incarnation of Christ is the ultimate paradox and can only be held to be true in a subjective or passionate manner, that is, through the passionate inwardness. Francis Lescoe in his book, *Existentialism With or Without God*, in explaining the mind of Kierkegaard in relation to absurdity writes,

The absurd is that the eternal truth has come into being in time, that God has come into being, has been born, has grown up and so forth, precisely like any other individual human being, quite distinguishable from other individuals³

Furthermore, the paradox marks the boundary and limits of objective and theoretical thought. The incarnation is just such a truth that can only be true subjectively. Thus, there is nothing to point to or observe that would give us a verifying principle to prove the God-Man issue and that Jesus Christ was really whom He said He was. This truth is arrived at through faith, and Faith cannot come about except through passionate inward awareness of the absurd paradox. Therefore, a subjective truth is only held personally with no recourse to empirical or scientific verification. Sincerity of mind by one will show that there are multitude of beliefs regarding the world and human life that are held quite regularly in this way. For example, the issues of religious experiences. Rudolf Otto calls such experiences ‘*mysterium tremendum*’ (tremendous mystery) in his *Phenomenology of Religion*.

2. SUBJECTIVE RELIGIOUS CHARACTER

The subjective character in what it means to be religious in Kierkegaard is that the life of the religious cannot be explained by the ethical lifestyle and values which is the mainstay of most organised religions. The religious life is higher than the ethical lifestyle and the obligations of the moral law. Kierkegaard’s models of the religious life are, Abraham, Job and Jesus Christ. All of them went beyond the ethical imperative and norms. According to Ogbonna Philip in his work *A Preface to Kierkegaard*, Abraham, Job and Jesus Christ violated the customs of their own cultures and traditions for a higher purpose. This suspension of the traditional and customary obligations is the problem with Kierkegaard’s religiosity and most organised religions. To live the religious life or become a Christian in Kierkegaard’s estimation therefore, is not a convenient operation nor is it a euphoria, it is not a dissension and a moving away from the ordinary. Whereas Judge William the ethical representative domesticates the religious language in an attempt to make it serve its ethical objective, Kierkegaard notes that the religious sphere is distinctly different by citing Abraham as an example in his book, *Fear and Trembling*, as one who was initially torn between the ethical and the religious stages. The act of obeying God to kill (sacrifice) his son Issac was demanded of him as a test of his faith which is clearly contrary to the clearest judgement which any human being can make, asking Abraham to commit one of the most revolting actions a human being can perform, merely to destroy his flesh and blood (Issac, his son), yet God demanded an unqualified faith whose very nature is contrary to ethical norms to which men subscribe. Alastair Hannay in his book, *Kierkegaard: A Biography*, describes the demand made on Abraham as,

An action dictated by the higher point of view and need not coincide with conventional morality. The point is that as the moral centre is shifted from the established ethico-political order to a transcendent source whose direct expression is the individual conscience, moral behaviour quite simply loses its transparency⁴.

The ethical is incapable of making the religious movement because the movement seems contrary to nature. The category to which Abraham belongs is that of faith and belonging to this, he is not a murderer intentionally but a believer and knight of faith in absolute relation to the Absolute God and Kierkegaard explains this better by saying in his book, *Fear and Trembling*,

By his act, he overstepped the ethical entirely and possessed a higher ‘*telos*’ outside of it, in relation to which he suspended the former. Why did Abraham do it? For God’s sake: in order that he might furnish the proof. But now when the ethical is thus suspended. How does the individual exist in whom it is suspended⁵

Abraham was thus the perfect knight of faith, ever ready to obey God in fear and trembling. He readily gave up the ethical for the religious, finite for the infinite. The ethical will be unable to do this because it clings to the finite. The truly religious man lives at the highest pitch, which means that without the anguish involved in killing one’s flesh and blood, no one can be a religious person. The leap of faith is that which brings one to awareness of his subjectivity and of God’s

inward presence within this subject. Thus, the religious mode of living depends on and absorbs the ethical by the leap of faith. The subject by this act imparts to the finiteness and temporarily of his or her existence an infinite and eternal significance to his or her life. Every aspect of one's life is henceforth determined and permeated by this God-relationship. Having entered into this life, an individual gains his or her selfhood by existing authentically. One leaps into the absurd, in the abyss of sin which becomes the abyss of faith. With the notion of consciousness of sin as an absolute necessity for the leap of faith. Kierkegaard makes a double distinction on the religious sphere, even though Kierkegaard primarily discusses subjectivity with regard to religious matters, however as already noted, he also argues that doubt is an element of the religious life and that it is impossible to gain any objective certainty about religious doctrines such as the existence of God or the life of Christ. The most one would hope for would be the conclusion that it is probable that the Christian doctrines are true, but if a person were to believe such doctrines only to the degree they seem likely to be true, he or she would not be genuinely religious at all. For Kierkegaard, "faith consists in a subjective relation of absolute commitment to these doctrines"⁶.

One who does not realise that Christian doctrine is inherently doubtful and that there can be no objective certainty about its truth does not have faith but is merely credulous. For example, it takes no faith to believe that a pencil or a table exists, when one is looking at it and touching it. In the same way, to believe or have faith in God is to know that there is no perceptual or any other access to God, and yet still has faith in God. As Kierkegaard writes, doubt is conquered by faith, just as it is faith which has brought doubt into the world. If one believes that one's moral position can be rationally justified, that it is a conclusion which can be validly derived from certain premises, then the premises in turn must be vindicated. This argument is applied to moral questions in Kierkegaard's early work *Either/Or*.

Against the theoretical foundation of Kierkegaard's time carried in the enlightenment tradition, developed in Kant and fully expressed in Hegel where the individual is abstracted, true existence is the lived existence. He found truth not in the theories but in personal struggle to realise oneself as expressed in the stages of life cycle. Kierkegaard thus, evinced a deep trust of the autonomous self, transcending speculative reason. He insisted that firmness with respect to logical distinction must constitute the foundation of genuine human reflection on conceptual realities as finite-infinite, temporal-eternal human-divine. Following this deep religious inclination, he held strongly that genuine religious consciousness presupposes richly articulated ethical life and can arise only in response to the needs of the ethical agent, but it goes more than that. Religion for Kierkegaard is more than ethics as it is so personal that the religious man can or may sometimes act contrary to social norms.

3. THE IDEAL LIVING

Kierkegaard frequently uses the verb 'to exist' in a special way, to refer to human existence. He describes human existence as an unfinished process in which the individual must take responsibility for achieving an identity as a self through free choice. For Kierkegaard, there is an alternative to reflection. In other words, one can think about anything in two ways, either in an objective way or a subjective way, this he calls objective reflection or subjective reflection. And existence itself is the divider of this two opposing modes of reflection. So to be an existing individual, it will be in a process of becoming. The question from this is what one will become. According to Kierkegaard, uncertainty is a hallmark of human existence. He holds that an existing individual is constantly in a process of becoming; the actual existing subject thinker constantly reproduces this existential situation in his thoughts and translates all his thinking into terms of process. Subjecting existence in the kierkegaardian sense is to say that an outlook or decision is inescapably related to the agent's needs, interests or values. For instance in choosing ones ethical values, one may consider objective values and available data, but in the final analysis, it is the person's decision. In confronting these issues, an individual subjectively brings his or her personal stance on issues of life. Kierkegaard emphatically rejecting collective thinking, culture or belief insists on the primacy of the individual over the collective. He argues in his book, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to philosophical fragments*, that subjectivity is truth and truth is subjective. A notion that refers to the distinction between an objective truth and an individual's subjective relation to that truth. The concept of subjectivity in Kierkegaard can also be understood in terms of the goal of life, which Socrates explains as one knowing one's self. Knowing oneself means being aware of who one is, what one can be and cannot be. The search for this self is the task of subjectivity. This task is the most important one in life. Kierkegaard first expressed his mind on subjectivity in his dissertation, *The Concept of Irony with Continual Reference to Socrates*, where he tried to show that Irony is the very bases of subjectivity. He states that just as Philosophy begins with doubt, so also a life that may be called human, begins

with Irony. He presented the dialectical method of Socrates, where Socrates the master ironist, introduces irony into discourse as he questions the sophists' pretensions to knowledge and Protagoras' belief that virtue can be taught. Kierkegaard also saw irony in the declaration of an Oracle upon Socrates as the wisest man in Athens because he(Socrates), was aware of his ignorance. He stated that irony is the very incitement of subjectivity because in his moral freedom, the individual stands alone against the established order. This makes irony a qualification of subjectivity. The ironist's great requirement is to live poetically, to become conscious of what is original in him or herself and stand above the self in freedom. The supreme poetic joy is in possibilities to be realised as victory over the world. Objective existence on the other hand is impersonal, it does not involve the subject and does not commit him or her. Objectivity is the stand point of the spectator who is uncommitted, but subjectivity is the stand point of the actor who is him or herself involved in the drama. In objectivity systematization of thought like in the Philosophy of Hegel, the thinker himself is left out of the scene. Kierkegaard somehow, in the Aristotelean-Thomistic tradition found himself trying to situate the individual that has been taken into two dangerous extremes by the proponents of both. A meticulous reading of the works of Kierkegaard raises the awareness of being passionate, inward, personally concerned and decisive when it comes to one's eternal happiness. It seems that if one is to take seriously the question of one's own existence in the current world-context, one must grapple with Kierkegaard's approach to religious truth as a state of subjectivity. Here God can never be known objectively. The kind of God that can be known objectively is no God at all. Objective belief rationalizes, systematizes, completes and arrives at certain knowledge, but God cannot be known entirely through objective means. To be subjective implies the process of discovering God continually and infinitely.

4. THE RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY OF KIERKEGAARD AS A TOOL FOR CURBING

Terrorism and Improving Development:

The Religious Philosophy of Kierkegaard can serve as a viable tool for curbing terrorism and improving development in the lives of individuals who believe that their lives have real value both to themselves and to the people around them. This is so because, in Kierkegaard's work, *My Point of View for my Work as an Author*, Kierkegaard describes an individual as "the category of the spirit, a spiritual awakening, a thing as opposed to politics"⁷. The Religious Philosophy of Kierkegaard recognizes the inestimable value of human life. The 1813 born Danish Religious Philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard is acclaimed as the father of existentialism. Existentialism is a philosophical movement that began in the 18th century in the Western world. Its primary tenet is to uphold the pride and value of a human individual and human life. Terrorism can be defined as violence or the threat of violence especially bombing, kidnapping and assassination carried out for political purposes. No gain saying that the act of terrorism is carried out by human beings. The question becomes, do such people value their lives and that of others? The answer is no. The reason could be that they have failed to realise themselves as individuals different from the crowd who should see themselves as agents of development rather than agents of destruction by realising their strength in positive thinking. The crowd is the untruth. The crowd has no hand, no head, no leg, no eye, no brain but the individual does. In his book, *The Point of View for my Work as an Author*, Kierkegaard describes the crowd in this way;

A crowd-not this crowd or that, the crowd now living or the crowd long deceased, a crowd of humble people or of superior people, of rich or of poor and co., 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 fraction⁸.

Acts of terrorism are mostly executed with the crowd-like mentality, and never as an individual stuff. How would an individual hide himself or herself in the crowd and carry out terrorist actions? Simply because such a person does not realise that his or her life and that of others have value, which if protected will enhance development in the society. This is so because, development thrives in a peaceful environment, terrorism does not encourage it. Again, the Religious Philosophy of Kierkegaard reveals the huge role religion plays in the life of an individual and in the society at large. Citing instance with the Christian Religion, Kierkegaard makes bold the fact that, recourse and reliance on the Christian God gives a therapeutic significance to the individual. In his book, *Sickness Unto Death*, he illustrates a situation of a sinful woman as is recorded in Luke7:37, were this sinful woman realises that she had sinned and could not help herself out of the psychological trauma but to take her burden to Christ, were she finally found refuge. Her recovery from that mental stress gave her strength to continue her good developmental works of care for the less privileged and the aged. She

was able to achieve that because she had a connect with the divine, which is the foundation of Kierkegaard's religious philosophy. Terrorism has no super divine and eternal approval. It is selfish, inhuman and wicked. It reduces human dignity to the dusts and human life to nothing. And so everyone should be familiar with the philosophy of Kierkegaard and ofcourse put it into practise. The subjective existence in Kierkegaard's philosophy is one that the individual says, 'I am and you are', as against the terrorist philosophy of 'I am not and you are not'. An in-depth knowledge of the Religious Philosophy of Soren Kierkegaard to a great extent will curb terrorism and enhance development.

5. CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, one understands that the philosophy of Kierkegaard holds strong the power of choose. This chooses is applied in deciding to live an authentic life. Authentic living is a type that one enjoys in living for the society and God. Kierkegaard advocates subjective experience in which an individual encounters a divine experience to live a fulfilled life. In this type of living, an individual realises his or her potentials with which he or she improves her or himself in personality development and societal development. An environment with terrorism can hardly have citizens who are keen with discovering themselves and developing their society. Decision to live an authentic, subjective and individualistic positive life is what Kierkegaard is advocating for, which encourages capacity building and environmental development. Religion and Philosophy therefore, are veritable tools for curbing terrorism and improving societal development. The particular cases of terrorism in Nigeria is a case in study. The Religious Philosophy of Kierkegaard is very much important in curbing and perhaps permanently stopping the incessant acts of terrorism and kidnapping in Nigeria. It is for the importance of the teachings of the philosophy of Kierkegaard that this paper recommends it for Nigeria and other areas in the world that are experiencing acts of terrorism and kidnapping.

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