

On the Philosophical Evolution of Transcendental Existentialism

Aşkımsal Varoluşçuluğun Felsefî Gelişimi Üzerine

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Abstract: Either methodologically or ideologically, philosophical development remains incessant. In virtue of this, the paper focuses on the ideological formulation of a synthesis from the remains of Existentialism and some of its inherent themes. This work looks at the possibility of Existentialism, as a philosophical enterprise, progressing into the transcendental realm. It opines that Transcendentalism is surreptitiously imbedded in many existential weltanschauungs and it is dubbed to have some crucial contributions to the philosophical circle. Those weltanschauungs were further captured, categorized and analyzed in a tripartite form in order to fathom a cogent basis for the plausibility of Transcendental Existentialism. Philosophical implications and some concurrent themes were thereby derived to widen the horizon of Transcendental Existentialism as an exquisite supplement to Existence Philosophy. In this wise, Transcendental Existentialism is packaged and presented to the philosophical guild for further assay.

Keywords: Existentialism, existentialist philosophy, transcendental existentialism, transcendentalism, philosophy of life.



Introduction

Philosophy as a discipline has perpetually placed existence as the motto for its pursuit of rigorous scrutiny. Right from the *Milesian* extrapolations till this hour the issue of existence remains a focal point in Philosophy. Man* as the inquirer always tries to satisfy the wanton of his wit by inquiring always for the meaning, essence and constitution of existence. Philosophical searchlights peer on issues of existence until Man (the inquirer) finds himself under the rays of the inquiring searchlights. Humanity now becomes a subject of inquiry.

Existentialism started shooting out from *Existents-Forhold* (Condition of Existence) as frequently used by the Danish Søren Aabye Kierkegaard (Oxford Dictionary, 2009). To corroborate the full existence of Existentialism as an academic exercise, Philosophy, therefore, must become Existence Philosophy: a passionate and deeply engaged activity in which the integrity and the authenticity of the human are decisively implicated (Chris, 2011). As the attention of philosophy shifted towards humanity, various developments arose in the philosophical parlance.

In fact, contributions also abound from relevant fields of learning into Existence Philosophy. Some religionists got attracted to this trend of Philosophy owing to the similarities of the existential themes with some religious conceptions and modifications surrounding human existence (Stumpf & Fieser, 2003: 456). Outspoken purveyors of existentialism formulated literary themes that promptly posit man as the protagonist of existence.

1. Extension towards Transcendence

In spite of the numerosity of the existential themes; Death stands out as the theme that signals finality to human finesse. It may not be fallacious to metaphorically generalize that Death also led to the dearth of the flow of seminal thoughts in existentialism. Meanwhile, death in its myriad representations have been envisaged and discussed by many Existentialists and writers alike. A reminiscence of some interesting discussions is necessary forthwith. To Heidegger (1973), death should not be

* The usage of *Man* in the whole paper should not be taken as gender biased. *Man* is a universal representation of the two genders as used in Existentialism.



construed as evil: it is rather an event that explicitly underscores the meaningfulness of the authenticity of man (Heidegger, 1973: 532). A repudiation of this position was launched that death is absurd and “every attempt to consider it as the resolved chord at the end of a melody must be sternly rejected” (Sartre, 1956: 533). This repudiation seems justified for it will be quite weird to *humanise* in the lane of the former portrayal of death – it will be as bizarre as a congratulatory speech in genocide.

Albeit the two opinions are contradictories, what cannot be disregarded by the duo is that death is a cessation of the man’s earthly existence. Notwithstanding the shimmering of the philosophical searchlights the Subject of inquiry (man) must cease to exist. Most likely than not, death as the finality of man is commonly thought provoking. It is naturally human for one to ask some questions which we shall call *WH-musings on Death*. These questions include: What is Death? Why Death? How does Death happen? Who is prone to die? How can human evade Death? What is next after Death?

Death continues to wield the sword innocently cutting Man off from the live spring of existence. As Man enters through birth he also exits through Death! The morally nonchalant attitude of death adds to our list of WH-Musings on death: Where does the exit leads to? Man should not just exit into oblivion. There should be somewhere where men can harvest the fruits of their moral cultivations after death.

What is obvious here is that death has no mind to mind moral or immoral beings. All must yield to the final call. Death is thus an activity – the pain given by the loss of loved ones has made humanity to personify death. Death is an activity like sleep it has no response to any moral stimulus. Death happens to anything that lives just like a usual sneeze or yawn. To evade death is to seek refuge in the asylum of immortality. The wit to devise such evasion is possibly prone to death itself. Death prevails over human curiosity or contempt. Perhaps for consolation, human race created the idea of *afterlife*. This might be where the exit leads to. If life really exists after death then it will be regarded as post existence. That is, an existence that is beyond the earthly existence: a transcendental existence.



2. Forms of Transcendental Existentialism

From the linguistic outlook, 'Transcendental Existentialism' (TE) is an uncommon combination in the glossary of Philosophical labels. Meanwhile, it is a synthesis from the thesis of Existentialism while Death stands as the antithesis. In his imagination of this possibility, Gabriel Marcel (1951) opines that "there must exist a possibility of having an experience of the transcendent as such, and unless that possibility exists the word can have no meaning" (Marcel, 1951: 46). He seems to be making experience to antecedently determine the meaningfulness of TE. In other words, if TE cannot be experienced then it is a meaningless combination.

Fortunately, there are varieties of experiential narratives that validate TE. Those narratives shall therefore be approached in tripartite forms: Weak, Mild and Extreme.

2.1. *Weak Transcendental Existentialism*

The weak form contains indigenous *weltanschauung* on the possibility of a post-existence. In Africa thought system there are beliefs in ancestors, deities and atavism. Akan notion of the *ancestral world* and selective reincarnation are typical instances. (Wingo, 2006) The ancestral world is regarded as the stage of the afterlife saga. Man enters into this world via the outlet of death; he is outside the common existence but he lives on in a transcendental realm. At times the man may come back into existence and he is identified by his old scars, voice, knowledge and ability among others. These are not farfetched as a transcendental existence. A reiteration is the Asian Hindu thought system which avows a transcendental attainment of the *Supersoul* that makes man free from the frustrating cycle of existence (also known as *Samsara*). The free man will consequently live transcendently outside common existence (The Bhagavad-Gita, 6:7-8). Western contribution to the weak form of TE is well captured in the catholic presentations of heaven and hell. *Soul travel* and *astral projections* of the Eckist is nothing short of living outside the common realm of human existence (Cramer & Munson, 2005). TE, in these contexts, is regarded as weak due to their mythological and religious undertones. The truth of these contexts is geographically relative and hardly entertains conclusive scientific verifications.



2.2. *Mild Transcendental Existentialism*

Mild TE may be woven out from the confines of Dream, Memory and Thought. *Dream* cannot be denied; it is even a universal habit of anything that sleeps and snores. Whenever man relaxes into the realm of Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep the possibility of dreaming cannot be avoided. Dream is said to have free-wheeling themes as well as broad-ranging contents. (Winson, 1990: 67) Dream constitutes events of many kinds: events that may percolate into the past, the present or the future. Dreaming is a spatio-temporal act that points to activities outside time. Events in most dreams have no representational contents in real life: dream events occur in dreamland which is best imagined than situated physically.

Existence as such cannot be equated with the existence of things in the world under the auspices of time and space. Existence in dreamland has a tinge of transcendence in it. One *Mr M* walking along Central Park, New York by *Time T* is hence experientially different from the (same) *Mr M* walking along Central Park, New York by *Time T* in a dream experience. Neither does *Mr M* have tactile reference nor does the Central Park have cartographic identification. This is also a transcendental existence. It is even possible for *Mr A* to be late but being in the dream makes him to exist despite his death. All subjects and objects of dream experiences (including oneself) are having an existence that goes beyond the physical realm.

Jourdan (1994) gave a similar account in which Near Death Experiences (NDEs) can procure some sorts of transcendental experience which he calls 'Non-ordinary experience' (Jourdan, 1994). Things that exist in the condition of NDEs have mental existence, transcending the ordinary levels of existence. Some subsets of this narrative include vision and trance.

In the same vein, human *memory* has an ingenuous capability of devising a milieu that harbours non-ordinary experience. This is psychologically identified as Episodic Memory: A memory of specific experience of specific time and specific duration (Lahey, 2009: 236-8). It is simply a recollection of bygone events at certain periods. Episodic memory and its constituents are, therefore, remote from the category of physical events



or experiences. The existential stage on which the event occurred is now mental not physical. When people are remembered they subsequently exist in our memory. This will succinctly makes it valid to claim that individuals like Muammar Gaddafi of Libya, British Margret Thatcher and Hugo Chavez of Venezuela are still very much alive. Their existence is impressed in peoples' mind because of their ever-present political stunts; they therefore live on despite their bodily demise.

A resemblance to this is the issue of *Thought*. Thought in this context is of little difference to the concept of memory as previously discussed. Whereas, transcendental existence of people is impressed on the mind in the concept of memory; it is the mind that impresses itself on the transcendental existence of people under the concept of thought. Human mind has the ability to bring back to existence the life of individuals that are out of physical existence. During reflections, attitudes of people, their ideas and their overall livelihood are brought to evaluation. Invariably, the people are made to exist in the thoughts of the thinker whether or not they exist physically. This coheres with the view of Plato that the visible world is a great ladder where there is developments from...man to heroes, [from heroes to] gods and finally ideas (Composta, 1988: 227). Existence of people as ideas in thoughts is not physical for the thoughts are not physical too. Such existence is consequently transcendental.

The triads given as candidates for Mild TE are derivations from common sense. To this end, TE in its mild form specifies reasonable vicinity where transcendental existence can occur. Unlike the weak form of TE, the mild form presented universal concepts like *Dreamland*, *Memory lane* and *Human thought* as the abodes of transcendental existence and experiences. A more plausible TE can be fathomed from the narratives given in this mild form without committing any existential fallacy.

2.3. *Extreme Transcendental Existentialism*

TE in its extreme form has some contentious concepts from the outlooks of science, religion and philosophy. These concepts shall be briefly touched in order to curtail the vastness of this paper. First is *Existence of God* which has been a fundamental locus of disagreement in philosophical musings on religion. Theism and atheism are the relevant schools of



thoughts in Philosophy of Religion. ("Philosophy of Religion," 2008) The former affirms while the later denies. Both the affirmation and the denial contribute to the extreme form of TE; since both are discussions on something outside empirical verifications.

Theism, on one hand, believes that God cannot be physically seen but can be defined as existing on the basis of some reasonable arguments. The transcendental relevance is that God is outside the physical existence. No matter how the concept is grasped, none can point to God as one can point to one's dog. On the other hand, Atheism attests that God does not exist at all. The relevance of this attestation is from the fact that the Atheist must have a full knowledge of God before she can deny the existence thereof. However the full knowledge of God as comprehended by the atheist makes God to exist as an idea even if the existence is denied conceptually. Ideological existence of God in the knowledge of the atheist is unavoidably transcendental.

The summation here is that the existence of God in its two variations cannot be *culled* from the spheres of transcendental existence. A variant of this view centres on the existence of man. Man is socially a being of time; there is a beginning and there is an end.

Looking at man, one is sure to believe that man did not just appear in the world as an adult from the onset. There is surely a beginning and several phases of developments till the end is reached. Biological facts on man show that there are two primary stuffs that constitute man. These two primary stuffs, [the *Spermatozoon* and the *Ova*] cannot be replaced with any other thing in the universe (Taylor & Others, 1998). It is even another topical issue that man can be the product of these intangible primary stuffs.

Ipsa facto, the primary stuffs can neither be created from anything in the world nor completely obvious to the ordinary eyes, it is therefore apparent that man is foundationally transcendental to the world. Transcendence in this light is similar to the *Kantian* ideas of the *self*, and of *God*, which are regarded as transcendental because they correspond to no object in human experience (Stumpf & Fieser, 2003:291). The existence of man is also transcendental in the world in that the world does not die with man; after his demise the world continues to exist. Man is a being in



the world yet his existence goes beyond the world. With the above exemplification of the tripartite forms of TE, this paper wishes to assert that TE has been an integral part of human life though academic confirmations might have been quite sparse.

3. The Notion of Transcendental Existentialism

If it is in anyway warranted, a theoretical definition shall be opined thus: Transcendental Existentialism (which is a calque for the Greek *Υπαρξισμός Υπερβατικοῦ*) is simply the philosophical actualization of man's evolutionary extension outside experiential and/or mortal existence towards the unconditioned. Existence of man in the realm of physical experience is conditioned by both time and space. Man is presented as an embodiment that belongs to the past, the present or the future: anything outside these durations is nought. This claim really makes man to be a limited being in the world. TE rather portrays man as an element that is beyond the limits of material experience.

Existentialism naturally focuses on the peripheral of (humanity) existence but TE is needed to go further; for existence qua existence transcends all boundaries. Muting any transcendental discussion in existentialism is tantamount to drawing boundaries to the humanness of humanity. The real concept of transcendence was developed by Plato in his characterization of *absolute goodness* as something beyond description and as knowable ultimately through intuition. Transcendentalism, therefore, philosophically signifies a belief in a higher reality than that found in sense experience or in higher kind of knowledge than that achieved by human reason (Microsoft® Encarta®, 2009). There also exists a form of Transcendental Existentialism extrapolated from the work of the erudite French Philosopher; Jean-Paul Sartre which takes man's *passing-beyond* subjectivity as transcendentalism such as only possible in the human world (Sartre, 1985: 15-24, 46-51). Russell Goodman (2003) gave a similar view that Transcendentalism among liberal New England Congregationalist is fixed on human striving (towards something) as opposed to human depravity. Although the TE presented in this work might be classified as a mystique, but it does not really specify an eclipse of existentialism. Existentialism is rather seen as a means towards an end.



4. Concurrent Themes in Transcendental Existentialism

TE like existentialism is not devoid of its own concurrent themes. The themes are integral terms inferentially coined out from the development of TE; they are to analytically reiterate the novel stance as taken by this paper. An examination of these themes shall be consequently attempted with tacit adherence to academic formalism.

Man has been thematically construed in existentialism as a being whose consciousness and existence cannot be without the world (Sartre, 1956: 104). TE stressed this notion that *Man* is seen as the self that is still immersed in physical existence. He is therefore having the potency of emerging out of the physical existence as the case may be. The emergence of man from the physical existence is sometimes via death. *Death* is perceived as a usual gateway into the transcendental realm. The irony is that death now becomes a birth into another existence. In this wise death is relieved of perpetual moral burdens.

No logical explanation, perhaps, exists for the possibility of TE but *Philosophical Faith* is taken as a rationale behind such possibility. Most of the concepts in TE are rationally dubitable and scientifically unverifiable that a philosophical faith is of import for one to see that man strives towards an unconditioned that is beyond himself. Philosophical Faith is acknowledged to the Karl Jaspers (Stumpf & Fieser, 2003:456-8).

Whenever man is born through death into the transcendental realm he ceases to be a man. This is so because he becomes free from all that makes him to be a man i.e., choices, anxiety and responsibilities. The stance taken here is in adherence to Plato's *divided line* that mode of thought in the visible world is tagged *opinion* but it takes a cataclysmic change as it reaches the intelligible realm to become *knowledge* (Bertrand, 1996: 136-8). There is always a divided line betwixt the transcendence and the physical. If man will cross this line he must undergo a change to becoming the *Transcendent* – the finished product of existence.

A main dissimilarity amid TE and Existentialism is the issue of time. Time is a kind of meter for human existence in the physical realm; there is always a yesterday, a today and a tomorrow. Whereas transcendental existence is not bounded by time: existence can be reflected in time and



out of time (as evinced under the forms of TE above). The tractability of time is what may be tagged *Timelessness* in TE. Another idea standing as a theme is *Adjudication* which has higher concentration in the sphere of ethics. Man (as the transcendent) is out of physical existence but he can in no way erase his history through repentance or any moral deed. Since all his earthly deeds have been done he is now reprehensible for all his deeds. People [the others] that are yet immersed in existence may praise him or condemn him for what has been done by him. In fact, a transcendental adjudication is envisaged by the religious notions of Heaven and Hell. Adjudication may be taken as the susceptibility of the Transcendent's mortal activities to human and natural judgements.

Man is apparently a subject of existence and not an object of existence. Objects in the world are made to serve some purposes and the purposes did exist before the objects. Gun, for example, was not in existence before the idea of creating something that easily eradicates lives faster than catapults was conceived. *Au contraire*, Man exists and he is saddled by default to find (reasons) essence for his existence. For instance, President Abraham Lincoln of America was not born a president but he thrived and made presidency an essence of his existence. In TE, *Essence precedes Existence*, it is the essence that counts; the existence of man is of little importance because he is now a Transcendent.

It is of outmost importance to emphasize that despite the changing of man into the transcendent, his freedom remains intact. This *Freedom* is, however, unlike the ability to make choices: it is just a freedom from death and time. When man dies he has nothing to do with death again, he is also free from time. Man should thus welcome death with gratitude rather than fear or hatred. The limit to this freedom is adjudication: man cannot in any way escape judgement. *Immortality* as a theme in TE may lack broad-ranged support; but it is still valid that existence in the transcendental realm is eternal. If transcendental existence is not bounded by time then the transcendent can live on eternally with no limit. *Immortality* may be seen, on one hand, as the idealistic and/or mystical continuity of existence. On the other hand, immortality affirms the end of death and time. Perchance, this is what led John Donne (1576-1631) into writing that "Death be not proud...one short sleep past, we wake eternally, And



Death shall be no more: Death thou shall die!" (Donne, 1972: 88). This idea of immortality is also evident in the song 'Young Forever' with cursory contempt for death and a celebrated curiosity for immortality: Fear not when, fear not why, Fear not much while we're alive, Life is for living not living uptight, see [you] somewhere up in the sky, Fear not die, I'll be alive for a million years, [bye-bye]...I'm forever young my name shall survive...my name shall be passed down to generations (Carter, 2010).

The theme that shall be finally examined here is *Forlornness*. This is the effect of understanding of prior existence as nothing but a vestigial part of human life. The Transcendent now understands humanity as multi-faceted and that the materials acquired for a blissful existence are nothing. His existence cannot influence his adjudication, what he ought to have valued was his essence (his deeds). An awareness of the irreversibility of the fact makes man (either as the Transcendent or as Man) to feel alone as well as sad. All hope to plunge into time and reverse the status quo is lost: Man (as the Transcendent) now bears his adjudication silently.

Conclusion and Implications

In a nutshell, TE cannot be denied for it has been replicated in the situations of our existence. It can also be seen as the goal of any existential pursuit. Man may not be aware of this or he may disprove it; that does not change the fact that man is constantly striving towards the transcendence. There is a surety that attacks may arise against TE due to its abstract components. It is true that TE has abstract components but that is not enough to dictate its decline into lexical dustbins. If man is well conceived as a complex configuration, it would be lucid enough that man should not be appreciated in a single-phased method. Attacks are also anticipated that TE has numerous foundations: that it had its developments from diverse fields of academics and that it may be difficult to suitably classify TE into a specific field of learning. The response here is that TE is not a concept that can be restricted or streamlined to a specific realm – because it is about everything about humanity.

TE is not meant to be flawless; it is a philosophical development that needs constructive criticism for its proper balance. TE as a philosophical development has its relevance in the whole gamut of Philosophy. It re-



echoes ethics as guideline for human progression towards transcendence. Man must know that he is never free from adjudication but he can pre-figure his adjudication by his current conducts. Therefore in his thirst for ideal social organisation (Politics) Man should note that he is too human to satisfy his thirst. The desired *utopian* satisfaction is subjectively achievable in the transcendental realm only. Nevertheless, ideal form or beauty (aesthetics) can only be attained if man will pursue an ideal essence. It is believed that humanity can create *narrative identity* from an ideal essence for a proper well-being. (Bauer & McAdams & Pals, 2008: 81-104) This is attached to the fact that essence precedes existence in TE. It also seeks to convince man into believing that the transcendence is comprehensible if approached through ideal method in thought and research. TE is thus similar to the diction of Paul Tillich (1969) as “the orientation of our mind towards the unconditioned” (Tillich, 1969). The ultimate reality in TE is probably the Transcendent (the finished product of existence) which is present in everyman in order for him to grasp it and actualize it without damaging its form with human inconsistencies; so as to gain favourable adjudication.

With the above, it is opined that Transcendental Existentialism (TE) is conceivable from the concurrent issues of existence and it is also comprehensible as having much philosophical implications that are beneficial to the humanness of humanity.

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Özet: İster metodolojik isterse ideolojik olarak olsun, felsefi gelişim süreklilik arz eder. Bundan dolayı, bu yazı varoluşçuluktan ve onun doğasından ileri gelen özelliklerinden uzak biçimde, bir sentezin ideolojik formülasyonu üzerine odaklanacaktır. Bu çalışma felsefi bir teşebbüs olarak varoluşçuluğun imkânına aşkınsal alana yönelerek göz atıyor. Çalışma, aşkınsallığın, pek çok varoluşçu dünya görüşü içerisine gizlice yerleştirilmiş olduğunu ve felsefe çevresine bazı çok önemli katkılar sunduğu şeklinde tanımlandığını varsayar. Ayrıca o dünya görüşleri, varoluşçuluğun akla yatkınlığı için inandırıcı bir temeli kavramak amacıyla, üç parçalı bir biçimde yakalanır, kategorize edilir ve çözümlenirdi. Felsefi eğilimler ve bazı eşzamanlı konular, dolayısıyla varoluşçu felsefeye mükemmel bir ek olarak aşkınsal varoluşçuluk hakkında yeni ufuklar açmak için türetilmiştir. Bu vesileyle, aşkınsal varoluşçuluk, daha ileri bir çözümlenme için felsefi bir birlik için ambalajlanmış ve sunulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Varoluşçuluk, varoluşçu felsefe, aşkınsal varoluşçuluk, aşkınsallık, yaşama felsefesi.

