

**DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
FACULTY OF ARTS
NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA**

**Course Guide for PHL 312 Existentialism, Hermeneutics
and Phenomenology**

Course Code	PHL 312
Course Title	Existentialism, Hermeneutics and Phenomenology
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Course Guide for PHL 312: Existentialism, Hermeneutics and Phenomenology

Introduction

Welcome to PHL 312: Existentialism, hermeneutics and phenomenology. PHL 312 is a three-credit unit course that introduces students to the salient discourses in existentialism, phenomenology and hermeneutics. It is meant to help students understand the meaning, nature and fundamental themes that characterise the discourses in these three traditions in philosophy. To achieve this, the study will first present an explanation of the meaning of existentialism, phenomenology and hermeneutics, and establish the relationship among them. Thereafter, students will be guided through the basic teachings of each of the philosophical traditions and methods. This will consist of the main themes and major figures in these traditions.

Course Objectives

The objectives of this course are:

- To help students understand the meaning, origin and basic teachings of existentialism, hermeneutics and phenomenology as philosophical movements and disciplines.
- To help students understand the historical development of existentialism, hermeneutics and phenomenology.
- To guide students through an understanding of the basic themes and issues in existentialism, hermeneutics and phenomenology.
- To familiarise students with the major authors/figures associated with existentialism, hermeneutics and phenomenology.

Working through this Course

To effectively achieve the objectives of this course, students are required to have a copy of the course guide, get and read the recommended course materials—bibliography, participate in online facilitation and consciously participate in the assessment process.

Study Units

This course has 21 study units that are structured into 5 modules. Each module consists of 4-5 study units as indicated below.

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Unit 2: Phenomenology

Unit 3: Hermeneutics

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Module 2: Some Major Themes in Existentialism

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- Unit 1: The Concept and Development of Philosophical Hermeneutics
- Unit 2: Modern Hermeneutics: Schleiermacher and Dilthey
- Unit 3: Contemporary Hermeneutics: Heidegger, Gadamer and Habermas

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Module 1: Conceptual Clarifications

Unit 1: Existentialism

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UNIT 1: EXISTENTIALISM

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1.0 Introduction

This unit clarifies the meaning of existentialism as a philosophical movement that emphasises the freedom of the human person who controls his own choices and actions and therefore, determines what he becomes and what happens to him. It explains the belief of existentialists that society should not inhibit the life and actions of the individual because such inhibitions strip the individual of his freedom and impede the development of his potentials. It attempts to define existentialism and clarifies the misconceptions about existentialism. Thereafter, it traces the historical development of existentialism and concludes with the central theme of existentialism which is the notion that existence precedes essence.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes

At the end of this unit, the student will understand the following:

1. The general idea of existentialism as a philosophical movement.

2. How existentialism as a movement metamorphosed into a philosophy.
3. The central theme of epistemology.

3.0 Main Contents

The content of this unit is the exposition of the general idea of existentialism which will include an analysis of its nature as a philosophical movement and/or method. It shall first discuss the general idea of existentialism and explain the misconceptions about existentialism. Thereafter, it shall expose the historical development of existentialism and critically analyse the central theme of existentialism.

3.1 What is Existentialism?

The concept, “existentialism” is derived from the verb to ‘exist.’ It connotes the idea of relating to, or affirming that which exists. To exist simply points to that fact that something is; “the concreteness and particularity of a thing” (Abwire, 2005: 128). Etymologically, it is traceable to the Latin word *existere* which means to stand out or to emerge. In this sense therefore, ‘to exist’ means “to stand out from the background as something that is there in reality” (Abwire, 2005: 128). In its philosophical sense, to exist implies standing out from nothing; it particularly denotes the human being as a distinct being different from other things. While other things are considered as mere physical objects, the human being is conceived as a being-in-existence. Therefore, the idea of existence which is derived from the verb ‘to exist’, as it is used here, connotes human existence different from mere physical objects because the human being has concern for itself. Søren Kierkegaard, for instance, argues that the individual does not just exist but he is “infinitely interested in existence” (1974:268). By this Kierkegaard means that the individual can reflect on his own existence, makes his own decision and shape his own existence in line with his reflections.

As a term, existentialism was coined by Jean-Paul Sartre even though the expression, ‘existence philosophy’ was already in use by philosophers like Karl Jaspers and Martin Heidegger in the same sense in which we use existentialism today. Jaspers, however, credited Kierkegaard as the one who provided the historically binding meaning of the term (see Copper 1990:2). As a philosophy, existentialism emphasises human existence as a revolt against the systems of thought that characterised the early part of the 19th century. According to J. Macquarrie;

The movement is not a school of philosophy but rather it should be seen as a style of philosophising. They do not believe in abstract speculation

but rather they are interested in concrete human existence. Their philosophising begins from man rather than from nature (1983:14).

As a philosophical movement, existentialism is traced back to Kierkegaard. He was the first to articulate the general themes of the movement. As a movement, it does not have a figure head or particular idea to which it is associated like other movements in the history of humankind. Existentialists—those who subscribe to the tenets of existentialism, are united by the common situation of existence.

Existentialism evolved as a reaction to a trend in contemporary Western philosophy that stressed the essence of things over their existence. For instance, the idea that the essences of things are what makes their instantiation possible. Essence refers to the primary element in the being of a thing. Contrary to this idea, existentialism emphasises existence as taking precedence over essence; insisting that the fact of human existence comes before his essence. Existence refers to the that which is in being. To argue that existence comes before the essence of a being—human being, implies that we exist first before we become whatever we want to become. In this regard, Sartre stresses that;

It means, first of all, that man exist, turns up, appears on the scene, and only afterwards defines himself. If man as the existentialist sees him, is indefinable, it is because at first he is nothing. Only afterwards will he be something and he himself will have made what he will be (1947:18).

As a philosophical movement, existentialism takes human existence as the point of departure for philosophy. For existentialist—advocates of existentialism, human existence encompasses the totality of the individual such that what the individual does, feels, his basic inclinations, associations, etc., are all part and parcel of his existence.

Existentialism is the most influential philosophical movement in contemporary Western philosophy. It is definitely not homogenous; neither is it a coherent system of philosophy because the existentialists differ in opinion from one another. They had their individual emphasis and did not belong to the same movements in society. For instance, Kierkegaard was a devout Christian, Friedrich Nietzsche was an atheist, Sartre was briefly a Marxist, just as Heidegger was briefly a Nazi. While Sartre insisted on the freedom of the will, Nietzsche denied it, and Heidegger would hardly mention it. Yet, they were philosophers whose commitment to improve man's fate in a world characterised with misery shared certain common ancestry, interests and presuppositions (Olajide 2000:128). This does not

eliminate the fundamental fact that existentialism represents a certain attitude in which the existentialists share a common concern for the individual and for personal responsibility.

Existentialism is suspicious of any attempt to submerge the individual in larger groups or forces (Mautner 2000). It vigorously questions and challenges the overly abstract and speculative philosophical culture of the pre-20th century era that relies heavily on logical systems. Thus, Paul Roubiczek describes it as:

A rejection of all purely abstract thinking, of a purely logical or scientific philosophy: in short, a rejection of the absoluteness of reason. Instead, it insists that philosophy should be connected with the historical situation in which it find itself and that it should be, not interested in abstract speculation; but a way of life. It should be a philosophy capable of being lived (1964:10).

Existentialists are identified as members of the same movement that emphasise the centrality of human existence philosophical enquiry. Together they oppose rational philosophy because they consider philosophy as the positive analysis of the human person within the context of his existence and the forces that inform how he shapes himself. Consequently, they criticise the notion or characterisation of philosophy presented by the analytic movements of rational modern Western philosophy. For existentialists, “philosophy ... must be brought down from the high heavens where abstract speculations have placed it” (Nyong 1996:40). They consider the human person as the matrix on which philosophising revolves and therefore, he should be separated from philosophy as the speculator. For philosophy to be a serious investigation into truth and reality, it must focus on the existence of man.

Existentialism criticises rationalism because the latter emphasises only the intellect in the understanding of reality. It criticises realism because realism talks about reality as that which is ‘given’ far away from the reality of man who perceives it. It also criticises the human situation in the industrial society because the industrial society dehumanise and depersonalises the human person by treating him like a machine. It queries the fact that the industrialised society does not accord man his humanity and the dignity due to him as the inventor machine. And argues that man must be given his due place, hence its emphasis on the primacy of the existing individual.

3.1.1 Some Definitions of Existentialism

Given the foregoing analysis, *Webster's New World Dictionary* defines existentialism as, "the doctrine that existence takes precedence over essence and holding that man is totally free and responsible for his acts. The responsibility is the source of dread and anguish that encompass mankind." In the same vein, the *American Heritage Dictionary of English Language* defines it as, "a philosophy that emphasises the uniqueness and isolation of the individual experience in a hostile indifferent universe, regards human existence as unexplainable and stresses freedom of choice and responsibility for the consequences of one's acts." These definitions are in contrast to the behaviourist notion that human beings live under the control of their environment and are governed by laws (Nwachukwu 1994).

We can also define existentialism as "a philosophy of subjectivity or selfhood" (Agidigbi 2006:4). Implicit in this definition is the individuality of the subject matter—man, and his conditions of existence. Existentialism sees man as an isolated individual who exists in an indifferent or hostile universe, but yet he is responsible for his actions because he makes free choices that shape his destiny. In this context too, Joseph Omoregbe defines existentialism as "the philosophy of human existence, a philosophy preoccupied with what it means for a human being to exist" (1991:38). Omoregbe's definition emphasises the concern of existentialist with human existence over and above inanimate objects that are – like stones and trees, or even lower animals. Thus, he points to the fact 'existence' is not used in existentialism in its classical meaning as referring all that is being, but specifically, it is used to refer to the human mode of existence or being.

For the existentialists, only human beings exist while other beings are. They simply are but not exist. To exist is "to be personally committed to a freely chosen way of life; it means being conscious of the problems of human life with all the choices open to man and opting for a certain way of life while assuming responsibility for it" (Agidigbi 2006:4). It is only human beings that can exist in this sense of the term 'existence'. This is why Martin Heidegger asserts that "the being that exists is man. Man alone exists. Trees are but they do not exist. Angels are but they do not exist..." (1956:215).

The aim of existentialism is to enable man find solutions to the problems of his existence. To achieve this aim, it must and it does involve many aspects of the existence of man. In this wise, William Barret defines existentialism as "a philosophy that confronts human situation in its totality, to ask what the basic conditions of human existence are and how man can establish his own meaning out of these conditions" (1962:143). Barret's definition simply implies that existentialism helps man to deal with his personal experiences as it stresses individuality, authenticity, anxiety and freedom. Yet another definition can be

found in Samuel Stumpf who describes existentialism as “a mode of philosophy which focuses upon the existing individual person; instead of searching for truth in distant universal concepts, existentialism is concerned with the authentic concerns of concrete existing individuals as they face choices and decisions in daily life” (1989:920).

Given the analysis above and the various specific definitions of existentialism, we can understand that the following questions are the primary interest to existentialism: (i) What is life? (ii) What is the world? (iii) What is man? (iv) Who am I? (v) What is being? Also, we can assert that the cardinal tenet of existentialism is situated in its popular maxim that ‘existence precedes essence.’ It indicates the belief of existentialist that subjectivity is the actual starting point of philosophy and that the focus of philosophy should be the individual instead of engaging in endless debates and arguments on the nature of reality.

3.2 Some Misconceptions about existentialism conclusion

It is good that we clarify the fact that the popular image of existentialism seems to convey some misconceptions of what it is. In other words, there are some conceptions or understandings of existentialism that do not correctly represent what it stands for. These misconceptions can be traced to misleading popular histories and ideas, incorrect dictionary definitions and encyclopaedia summaries.

Some of these erroneous descriptions of existentialism include: *The Oxford Companion to French Literature* first edition description of existentialism as “the metaphysical expression of the spiritual dishevelment of a post-war age.” It is true that existentialism is a post-war movement (as we shall discuss in unit 3.3 below) that was inspired by the human conditions of the time. It is certainly not true that it is a post-war dishevelment, despair or malaise. If we conceive existentialism in terms of the latter, we shall be mixing up existentialism as a philosophy and existentialism as a vogue. If existentialism is mere a vogue—an expression of an age, it means its claims are temporary and only valid locally to the places where the second world war had caused much destruction. This will deprive it of its universality in terms of the distinctiveness of human existence, the interdependence of mind and world, and the human existential freedom. In other words, it means the phenomena that existentialism espouse do not apply to all peoples, at all times and in all places. This is certainly not true because the nature of human existence that existentialism espouses is common to all humans everywhere.

Also is the J. M. Roberts’ description of existentialism as “the assertion that life is more than logic ... that the subjective and personal must be more highly valued and the objective

and intellectualised must be depreciated” (1977:467). Again, we have the misleading definition of *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary* fifth edition that describes existentialism as “an anti-intellectual philosophy of life, holding that man is free and responsible, based on the assumption that reality as existence can only be lived, but can never become the object of thought.” The error of conceiving existentialism as ‘anti-intellectualist’ can be traced to the existentialist use of everyday life experiences to describe and conceptualise human nature. Since the existentialist is not esoteric in his investigation and claims, he is misconceived to be non-rigorous and uncritical. Although existentialism does not subscribe to the rationalist theorisations, it is certainly not irrational. It is also not uncritical, rather, it emphasises the existential situation of our being, the humanness of the world. This emphasis leads to the misconception that existentialism denies objectivity of the world and suggests that it is subjectivist philosophy. While it is true that existentialism pays particular attention to the individual as a subject, it does not mean it is a subjectivist philosophy because it applies its findings to the generality of human nature irrespective of location and other particular differentiations.

3.3 Historical Development of Existentialism

Existentialism originated in Paris after the second World War. It began like a philosophical fad, with practitioners expressing their views and opinions in cafes and not within the four-walls of universities where you have professional philosophers. Like most fads, existentialism did not pass into oblivion, rather, it persisted and gained momentum and found its way into virtually every form of human thought and expressions, including the novel, theatre, poetry, art and theology. It has since achieved a far wider response than any other mode of philosophy (Stumpf 1989: 474).

Under the Weimar Republic in Germany, existentialism was one of the major currents of thought with Heidegger and Jaspers among its leaders. By the middle of the 19th century, Kierkegaard worked out its main themes, with variations in the works of Fredrich Schelling and Karl Marx. So many writers with different philosophical orientations became identified with existentialism and this is responsible for the many forms of existentialism we have. It is said that we probably have more differences than similarities among existentialists’ philosophers. What however, all existentialists’ philosophers have in common is their concern about human existence; the conditions and quality of the existing human individual (Stumpf 1989:475).

Over the centuries, the individual had been pushed to the background by different systems of thought, historical events, and technological forces. Philosophy, before existentialism

did not pay much attention to the uniquely personal concerns of individuals. Instead, it had been more concerned with the technical issues of metaphysics, ethics, and epistemology in general and objective manner. The same story of disregard for the feelings and aspirations of individuals was observed in historical events, especially wars. Technology which initially was supposed to aid man gathered its own momentum and forced individuals to fit their lives into its own rhythm of machines rather than the other way round. Thus, the peculiarly human qualities of the individual were fading out. As Stumpf puts it “they [individuals] were being converted from ‘persons’ into ‘pronouns,’ from ‘subjects’ into ‘objects,’ from an ‘I’ into an ‘it’” (1989:475).

3.4 Some of the Central Themes of Existentialism

Module 2 shall deal with, in details some of the major themes in existentialism. However, it is good that we familiarise ourselves with the main ideas that these themes promote. The fundamental theme of existentialism is the idea that existence precedes essence. By this, it means that the most important consideration for the individual is the fact that he or she is an individual. He exists first before he becomes what he shapes himself into based on his free choices. Therefore, we cannot talk about his essence without his actual life.

Another important theme of existentialism is man. Man is understood as a self-transcending being who consciously projects into the future; he goes beyond his present and looks into the future. For existentialists, man should be the central focus of philosophy. Man is a self-creating being who first exists, and then makes himself what he is because existence precedes essence. Man is a self-conscious irreplaceable unique individual who has his own irreversible history. Existentialists demonstrate an antipathy towards the anonymous featureless standards which prevail in society therefore, they emphasise the importance of man. Hence, they feel the need for a philosophy that is directed towards the internal edification of the individual self. This will be a kind of personalist philosophy.

Freedom, choice and responsibility constitute another main theme in existentialism. Freedom refers to the individual’s possibility of choice (MacIntyre :149). Freedom is part of the structure of the being of man; therefore, it is a basic condition of his existence. By virtue of his very existence, man is condemned to be free. This implies that freedom is identical with human existence; it is not something that we acquire. Freedom and choice go together because freedom implies the freedom to choose. By choice, existentialists mean the concrete actualisation of freedom. Since freedom and choice are inherently connected, they both imply responsibility. Freedom compels man to assume responsibility for his life; that is to take his destiny in his hands. Human freedom is freedom to choose and not freedom not to choose.

The relationship between man and the world is another theme in existentialism. For existentialists, the existence of the world is a matter of course and man and the world are

inseparable. This is because man being a conscious being does not exist in a vacuum; he is a part of the world and cannot exist without the world. The reality of the world is attached to the existence of man, who perceives the world as the existence of man is attached to the world in which he lives. Man is just not a thing in the world; he is an inseparable part of the world. Heidegger describes man as a 'being-in-the-world.' And Sartre (1956:104) argues that there is no world without selfhood and without the world there is no selfhood.

Yet another important theme in existentialism is the individual (self) versus society or man and the others. Existentialism maintains that the existence of the individual necessarily implies the existence of others, for the individual cannot exist without the others. This means that man is not only a being-in-the-world but also a being-with-others. Existentialists denote the social nature of man as a being-with-others. Even though man maintains his individuality, singularity and uniqueness, he is a being who is constantly in touch with others. However, as existentialist asset, the individual should not allow himself to be lost in the world. In this regard, they make a distinction between authentic and inauthentic existence.

Facticity which describes man's awareness of his finitude is another theme in existentialism. Facticity is about man inability to know beyond what he can know; it is about the factors that limit human existence. Even though man is not the author of his life he has to take responsibility for his mode of being. As a being-in-the-world, he has to deal with the reality of death, decay, sickness, disappointments, sorrow and incapacitations. All these are limitations to man's freedom; they constitute the facticity of human existence. While it is the case that facticity explains the limits and boundaries that we cannot go beyond, it does not imply that we cannot make the efforts to overcome our shortcomings; to surmount them and take charge over them.

These and some other themes in existentialism shall be more critically analysed in module 2.

4.0 Conclusion

In this unit, we have considered the meaning and nature of existentialism as a philosophical movement. Herein, we presented and analysed some definitions of existentialism, as well as exposed some of the misconceptions that popular notions and ideas convey about existentialism. We also considered briefly the historical development of existentialism from a fad in cafes to a full blown philosophical movement and indicated some of the major themes that existentialists concern themselves. A keen reader would, at this point, understand that existentialism is an interesting philosophical tradition that focuses on the nature of man as a being-in-the-world, assailed by many forces but has the freedom to make

choices and take responsibility for what he becomes. Unlike most other abstract discourses in philosophy, it tends to be more contingent and concrete.

5.0 Summary

- Existentialism is a philosophical movement that emphasises human existence as the starting point of philosophy.
- Existentialism is the philosophy of human existence; preoccupied with what it means for a human being to exist.
- Existentialism originated in Paris as a philosophical fad that gained current and spread over the philosophical world as a critical reflection on human existence and the forces that assail him.
- There are a number themes within existentialism. Central among them is the notion that existence precedes essence.

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

- What is the central concern of existentialism?
- Briefly trace the origin of existentialism.
- Briefly identify and characterise some of the major themes in existentialism.

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UNIT 2: PHENOMENOLOGY

Contents

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1.0 Introduction

In this unit, we shall clarify the concept of phenomenology by discussing its meaning and analysing some definitions of phenomenology. We shall also discuss the goals of phenomenology. This unit is meant to introduce you to the philosophical method of phenomenology by which we study the structure of the various types of experiences we have. This unit will explain and help you to understand phenomenology as a descriptive way to study phenomenon in its pure state. By pure state, we simply mean not allowing our preconceptions to interfere in the process of interpretation of what is.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes

At the end of this unit, the student will understand the following:

1. The meaning and method of phenomenology.
2. Some of the definitions of phenomenology.
3. The goals of phenomenology.

3.0 Main Contents

The main content of this unit is an exposition of the general idea of phenomenology which will include an analysis of its nature as a philosophical method. First we shall discuss the meaning of phenomenology and consider some definitions of phenomenology. Thereafter, we shall analyse the goals of phenomenology.

3.1 What is Phenomenology?

Phenomenology is a philosophical method often used to designate the method and movement that originated in the work of Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938). Other prominent figures associated with this method and movement include, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre. The work of Husserl attempts to provide a direct description of our experiences just as we have them. In other words, he tries to separate our experiences from their origins and development; from the causal explanations that historians, sociologists or psychologists give them (Mautner 2000). Husserl rejected the Kantian distinction between the phenomenon—what appears and the noumenon—what is true or real. He agreed with Kant on the noumenon by arguing that on the phenomenon exists. According to him, philosophers should concern themselves with what appears immediately to our consciousness; they should try to give an exact and careful description of what appears immediately to consciousness since the truth lies in what appears and not in what is behind what appears (Agidigbi 2006:10). After Husserl, the likes of Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty refined the phenomenological method. Their reformation did not necessarily agree with the conclusions of Husserl.

Prior to Husserl, phenomenology as a term was used by Franz Brentano, Mach and Pfander to describe or analyse phenomena. They used it to describe inquiries that look beyond what is directly given to us in our experiences. Hegel too, in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) had used the term to describe how the spirit gradually makes its appearance. It is a process that begins with initial oppositions between itself; that is, the spirit and something else; between different forms of consciousness, and finally ending when all the separation is overcome with self-knowledge. This is what Hegel called the absolute knowledge (Mautner 2000). As a term, phenomenology was first used by Johann H. Lambert's in his *New Organon* (1764). In its usage here, it describes the inquiry into our sensory experience, it presents a theory of how things appear to us (Mautner 2000).

According to Jim Unah, “phenomenology derives from the word ‘phenomena’ or ‘phenomenon’ which has crystallised into a technical philosophical concept of diverse usage since the inception of Western scholarship” (1996:205). The word ‘phenomena’ refers to things, events or occurrences and philosophers have used in different and various ways. Some of such usages include; Heidegger's use of ‘phenomena’ to describe the totality of what is open to us for inspection or that which can be brought to light. Lambert uses it also to describe the features of human experience that are illusory, thus, for him, phenomenology will be the theory of illusion. Kant uses the term to describe things as they appear to us as distinct from things as they are in themselves. So Kant will understand

phenomenology as the theory of things as they appear to us. For Hegel, phenomenon is the self-manifestation of universal reason; therefore, phenomenology will be, for him, the science of the self-actualisation of the spirit as it moves from self-rejection to self-reconciliation. Charles Peirce understood phenomena as including all observable entities and everything that can be constructed by the mind. Thus, phenomenology, for him, is the study of perceptions of objects or things; real or imagined (Unah 1996:205-206).

Husserl, who is regarded as the father of phenomenology, uses the term ‘phenomena’ to describe objects as they are experienced by the transcendental self. According to him, objects manifest themselves—appear to us as they are. This implies that the way we perceive them is not determined by the way they appear or manifest themselves but by the way and manner we position ourselves in relation to them. If, there is a distortion of reality, it is not in the manifestation or appearance of the object of perception but in the way and manner we are positioned in perceiving them. In Unah’s words,

If we approach objects and events from a position of bias, prejudice, pre-conception or predisposition we end up with a grotesque and distorted picture of such objects and events. But if we approach things from a predispositionless, unbiased, unprejudiced position we easily understand things as they are for we are thus enabled to grasp their essences (1996:207).

The implication of this is that in the opinion of phenomenologists, phenomena as things and events are capable of being known just as they are. It means that things and events do not appear to us different from what they truly are; neither do they hide aspects of themselves when they manifest themselves. Therefore, they are capable of being known as they are. If we do not know them as they are, it is because of our predispositions and preconceptions that we cannot grasp their essences. According Phenomenologists, things and events can be known exactly as they are since objects of experience show themselves as they are. This notwithstanding, perceiving things as they are, is not the right of every subject, but rather the exclusive preserve of a purified and detached ego. The purified and detached ego is the presuppositionless mind.

3.2 Some Definitions of Phenomenology

The foregoing discussion shows some of the various understandings of phenomena and the corresponding understandings of phenomenology that could be inferred from them. The analysis indicates that there is a dichotomy between ‘what appears to us’ and what truly is. We can further infer for the above that things have a double which are not immediately apprehended by our normal ordinary perceptual abilities. Consequently, Unah defines

phenomenology as “the study of the transient, ephemeral, outward features of human experience” (1996:206).

Maurice Natanson defines phenomenology as “a mysticism whose central concern is a dark realm of essences, as an intuitionism of a Bergsonian order, as an anti-scientific doctrine, or as a philosophy that denies the reality of the world by bracketing out existence” (1968:5). This definition implies that phenomenology as a concept describes the philosophical movement whose primary objective is to directly investigate and describe phenomenon as it is consciously experienced. Implicitly therefore, we cannot talk about theories of causal explanation about things. Neither can we claim that things are trapped in unexamined preconceptions and presuppositions.

Joseph Omoregbe defines phenomenology as “a method of philosophising, a philosophical method which aims at an unprejudiced, description of the objects of experience” (2001:21). In line with Omoregbe’s definition, Olatunji Oyeshile defines phenomenology as “the descriptive study of phenomena, of thought, in their pure and unadulterated form without our prejudices influencing our description” (2006:45). Both Omoregbe and Oyeshile consider the phenomenological method as one in which we put ourselves in a position to intuit and describe things as they appear to us directly or immediately before we begin to reflect on or interpret what we have experienced.

From the definitions above, we can claim that the aim of phenomenology is to perceive the object of inquiry with a completely open mind; without any presuppositions, bias or prior assumptions. We do this when we bracket or suspend all our prior assumptions, suppositions and conceptions of the object of inquiry so that our minds become free and open to receive the object of experience just the way it appears to our consciousness in experience (Omoregbe 2001:21). Hence, it is a presuppositionless description of the given facts of experience. It operates on the basis that if we approach the object of inquiry from a position of bias, prejudice, preconception or predisposition, we end up with a distorted view of the object. If, on the contrary, we approach the object of inquiry without bias, prejudice, preconceptions or predispositions, then we can easily understand the object as it is, because we will grasp the essence of the object. Phenomenology can therefore, be said to be the view that what leads to distortion of reality is not the way things appear but the way and manner we position ourselves in relation to them.

The phenomenological way perceiving the object is referred to as an ‘eidetic reduction.’ It means the perceiver removes from the object of perception “all existential traits, all its peculiar characteristics and all its accidental qualities so that only its essence is left” (Omoregbe 2001:22). What the phenomenologist is looking for is the essence of things. He

is not interested in the particular qualities or existential traits of things. In this context, Husserl defines phenomenology as an ‘eidetic science’, that is, the science of essences.

According to D. Stewart and A. Mickunas, phenomenology is “a return to the traditional tasks of philosophy without presuppositions, the intentionality of consciousness and the refusal of the subject-object dichotomy” (1974:4). It means then that the basic objective of phenomenology is to analyse human experience such that the subject of inquiry is able to grasp the object of inquiry in its pure state. Therefore, we can say that phenomenology is the philosophy of creative intuition (Oyeshile 2006:45).

According to Anthony Okeregbe, any attempt to define phenomenology finds one intellectually entrapped in a web of lexical and conceptual confusion (1996:243). This implies that it is unlikely for us to articulate a precise definition of phenomenology. Therefore, it would suffice to know that phenomenology can simply be said to be the *logos* of the phenomenon. By *logos*, we mean “an utterance, an account, a discourse, a thought, a reason why, the faculty of reason, etc.” (Mautner 2000). And by ‘phenomenon’ we mean “a thing (a quality, a relation, a state of affairs, an event, etc.) as it appears to us, as it is perceived” (Mautner 2000). Given this understanding of phenomenon, we can describe it as that which manifests itself directly through the acts of consciousness. This description implies that phenomenon is not the empirical manifestation of things as Kant understands it in his distinction between phenomenon as things the way they appear to us different from things as they are—noumenon. Phenomenology deals with the descriptive explanation of what presents itself to our consciousness, as it presents itself to our consciousness, in so far as it presents itself to our consciousness. In logical language, this will be the equivalent of the “if and only if” situation. The operative theme here is ‘consciousness’ hence Natanson argues that to truly understand the meaning of phenomenology, we need to make an enquiry into the intentionality of consciousness. There, we can take as our working definition that phenomenology is “an epistemologically neutral instrument for the inspection of the presentation of consciousness” (Natanson 1968:10).

3.3 The Goals of Phenomenology

According to Oyeshile, “the diversity of points of view held by philosophers working within the phenomenological tradition not only makes the summary of the phenomenological tenets difficult, it also points up the fact that other descriptions of phenomenology with regards to different areas are possible” (2006:44). Notwithstanding what Oyeshile claims, Okeregbe illustrates the goals of phenomenology when he outlined the following as the goals of phenomenology:

- i. It seeks to find and develop itself as a presuppositionless philosophy.
- ii. It seeks a 'return to the things themselves' of immediate experience.
- iii. It seeks to clarify the meanings of the fundamental terms, basic concepts and essential categories of all special or higher level disciplines, including the natural sciences.
- iv. It seeks to locate and clarify the *a priori* structure of all so-called regional ontologies.
- v. It seeks to return to the Cartesian and Leibnizian ideal of a *mathesis universalis* while at the same time it tries to reconstruct its character with regard to a point of departure and an ultimate goal for a fully realized science of man.
- vi. It seeks to continue the essential style of transcendental philosophy involved in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* while at the same time critique's Kant's transcendental philosophy as a further development of Kantianism.
- vii. It seeks to reconstruct the total range of the life of consciousness in terms of its underlying eidetic structure from the standpoint of transcendental subjectivity.
- viii. It seeks to understanding the genesis of meaning in nature and in history and endeavours to describe the sedimentation of meaning that lie within the evolution of our experience.
- ix. It seeks to reconstruct the life-world within which each one is formed, exists and dies (Okeregbe 1996:245).

These goals are mutually related and together give an insight into the overall theses of phenomenology. They therefore, expose the grounding principles of Husserlian thought, namely;

- i. Phenomenology presents a unique method of pursuing its special ends by developing a theory of *epoche* and of reductions.
- ii. Phenomenology presents a radical theory of consciousness and that of intentionality.
- iii. Phenomenology expresses a new theory of meaning that is intimately bound with the Husserlian theory of essence.
- iv. Phenomenology requires and presents a special theory of evidence developed in terms of 'self-evidence.'
- v. Phenomenology articulates a theory of transcendental consciousness in which the constitutive activity of the transcendental ego emerges as the sovereign theme (Okeregbe 1996:246).

7.0 Conclusion

Phenomenology is a philosophical method that aims to understand reality as it is, devoid of the agent's presuppositions and biases. It is difficult to provide a precise definition of the concept. Nevertheless, its articulation in the works of Husserl, who is closely associated with the method and often referred to as the father of the phenomenological method, indicate that phenomenology is an eidetic science—science of the essences of things. This implies that phenomenology is a method that enables us to perceive and understand things as they present themselves to us. It seeks to understand the meaning of things as we experience them.

8.0 Summary

- Phenomenology is a method of inquiry by which we grasp the essences of things as we experience them.
- Phenomenology is a descriptive explanation of what is presented to our consciousness.
- The goals of phenomenology can be articulated in several ways; primarily, it is an attempt to develop presuppositionless philosophy.

9.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

- Briefly explain the idea of phenomenology.
- Provide two definitions of phenomenology and analyse them.
- Itemise the goals of phenomenology.

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Unit 3: HERMENEUTICS

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1.0 Introduction

Broadly, hermeneutics is the art of interpreting text; it traditionally denotes the study of the interpretation of written texts; especially in the areas of literature, religion, and law. It studies the theory and practice of interpretation. It is both a first order and second order theory of understanding and interpretation of linguistic and non-linguistic expressions. Historically, it dates back to ancient Greek philosophy as a theory of interpretation and etymologically it is traced back to the Greek mythological god, Hermes—the messenger between the gods and between the deities and humans. He said to have invented language and speech and reputed for interpretation, lying, stealing and a trickster. From being a branch of biblical studies, it developed into the study of ancient and classic cultures and became a philosophical theory with the German Romanticism and idealism. As a philosophical theory, it is concerned with ‘how to read’ and ‘how we communicate.’ Thus, it is a theory of the interpretative process; the meaning and philosophy of language and semantics.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes

At the end of this unit, the student will understand the following:

1. The meaning and notion hermeneutics.
2. How philosophical hermeneutics developed.
3. Identify some of the important figures in philosophical hermeneutics.

3.0 Main Contents

This unit is an exposé of the meaning of philosophical hermeneutics. It introduces the students to the concept of hermeneutics and the development of the philosophical notion of hermeneutics. It also helps the students to be familiar with some of the major figures in the development of philosophical hermeneutics.

3.1 What is Philosophical Hermeneutics?

Philosophical hermeneutics is the art of interpreting text which traditionally refers to the study of the interpretation of written texts in the areas of literature, religion and law. As a first and second order theory of understanding and interpretation of linguistic and non-linguistic expressions it dates back to ancient Greek philosophy. Its etymology is traced to the Greek mythological god—Hermes.

In the middle ages and the Renaissance, hermeneutics was an important branch of Biblical studies. In this sense, it is understood as the study of ancient and classic cultures. It acquired the status of a philosophical theory with the German Romanticism and idealism where it is understood as the conditions of possibility for symbolic communication and not merely just a methodological or didactic aid for other disciplines. Thus, its interest now goes beyond ‘how to read’ to ‘how do we communicate at all.’ In this wise, it brings within its purview the verbal or non-verbal forms of communication and all aspects of communications like presuppositions, pre-understandings, the meaning and philosophy of language, and semantics (Ferguson, Wright and Packer 1988).

Martin Heidegger shifted the focus of philosophical hermeneutics from interpretation to existential understanding. For him, hermeneutics is a direct, non-mediated and a more authentic way of being in the world, than simply a way of knowing (Heidegger 1927:125). Thus, Heidegger went beyond symbolic communication to something more fundamental, namely, the issues of human existence. Within this context, hermeneutics is an interrogation into the deepest conditions for symbolic interaction and culture in general (George 2020).

3.2 The Development of Philosophical Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the Latinised version of the Greek word *hermeneutice* which has been part of the everyday language since the 17th century. As a practice, it predates the 17th century because Plato used it in a number of his dialogues. He compared hermeneutical knowledge to *Sophia*. For Plato, hermeneutical knowledge was revealed and it was religious, while *Sophia* was knowledge of the truth-value of utterance. Aristotle moved it a step further when he titled his work on logic and semantics *Peri Hermeneias*. With the advent of the Stoics, hermeneutics gradually took on the idea of a methodological awareness of the

problems of textual understanding, though the Stoics did not develop a systematic theory of interpretation, Philo of Alexandria however did.

The two prominent names whose thoughts indicated reference to hermeneutics in medieval philosophy are Augustine and Aquinas. Augustine had a profound influence in the understanding of modern hermeneutics. He introduced the universality-claim of hermeneutics through the connection he established between language and interpretation and from his claim that the interpretation of scripture consists in a deeper, existential level of self-understanding. Aquinas also had an impact on the development of modern hermeneutics. He questioned the authenticity of certain pseudo-Aristotelian texts by comparing them to the existing Aristotelian corpus. By doing so, he anticipated a critical-philological procedure. This became a crucial aspect of Friedrich Schleiermacher's notion of grammatical interpretation. This shift in the meaning occasioned by Schleiermacher and the likes of Wilhelm Dilthey and others triggered the ontological turn that Heidegger's *Being and Time* brought into the understanding of hermeneutics in the 1920s and later promoted by Hans-Georg Gadamer in his *Truth and Method*.

The development of early modern hermeneutics is found in Martin Luther's *Sola Scriptura*. Based on his emphasis on faith and inwardness, the authority of the traditional interpretations of the Bible was questioned. Luther wanted to emphasise that each reader of the Bible had to face the challenge of making the truths of the Bible her own. The reader is not bound to understand the text on the basis of being faithful to the predominant or authorised readings of the time. For him, each reader must make out her own path to the potential meaning and truth of the text. This made reading a problem in a new way (George 2020).

Giambattista Vico built on Luther's position to argue against the Cartesianism of his time. According to Vico, thinking is rooted in a given context and the given context is historically developed and intrinsically related to ordinary language as it has evolved from the myths and poetry of the people to the theoretical abstraction and modern vocabulary. This implies that to understand oneself is to understand the origin of one's own intellectual horizon. Therefore, self-understanding and understanding cannot be separated. Self-understanding provides us knowledge of who we are, living, as we do, in a given historical context of practice and understanding.

Along with Luther and Vico, Baruch Spinoza also contributed to the development of the early stages of modern hermeneutics. In his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670), he argued that we have to keep in view the historical horizon in which the texts were written and the mind of the authors for us to understand the most dense and difficult sections of scriptures. According to him, to understand the parts we need to understand the whole and the whole can only be understood on the basis of the parts. This is what is referred to as the hermeneutic circle; the movement between the parts and the whole of the text. It is an important theme in hermeneutics.

Luther, Vico and Spinoza shaped and gave direction to modern hermeneutics. They did not develop any explicit philosophical theory of understanding; neither did they outline a method or a set of normatively binding rules to guide the process of interpretation. Johann Martin Chladenius was the first to do this when he distinguished between hermeneutics and logic. According to him, variations in our perception of phenomena and problems bring about difficulties in our understanding of other people's texts and statements. He united hermeneutics and epistemology as he joined the search for truth and the search for understanding. This anticipated an important orientation in 20th century hermeneutics.

Modern hermeneutics is built on the two pillars of:

- i. The interest in the human sciences and willingness to defend the integrity of the human sciences as distinct from the natural sciences.
- ii. The deep concern with the problem of making sense of the texts handed over to us from the past. The first attempt to articulate a genuinely philosophical hermeneutics starts at the point where these two orientations meet and mutually inform one another. And this was the period of the German romanticism and idealism.

3.3 Some Important Figures in Philosophical Hermeneutics

Three very prominent names in modern hermeneutics are Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, and Martin Heidegger. The outline of philosophical hermeneutics laid down by these thinkers was further developed in the works of more contemporary thinkers like Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jurgen Habermas.

Schleiermacher pulled together the intellectual currents of the time so as to articulate a coherent conception of a universal hermeneutics—linguistic meaning in general. He advocated the openness to understanding others which makes it possible for us to realise that what looks natural, true, or coherent may cover something deeply unfamiliar. According to him, if we are to understand the meaning of another person's speech or text, we have to focus on two aspects of the person's language-use; namely, (i) the shared resources or grammar and syntax, and (ii) the individual application.

Dilthey and others carried hermeneutics forward by returning to Vico's old problem of how to philosophically justify and account for the particular kind of objectivity in relation to the study of man. Although, Vico was interested in culture and history at large, Dilthey was specifically focused on we can justify the humanities within a university system. He expanded the search for philosophical legitimation of the human sciences.

Heidegger transformed philosophical hermeneutics by arguing that hermeneutics, above all else is ontology. By ontology, he meant the most fundamental conditions of man's being in the world. Though we refer to Heidegger's position as a complete transformation, it was not completely severed from earlier hermeneutical philosophies. He talks about the

hermeneutics of facticity, and theorises on the concepts of understanding, interpretation, and assertion from new points of view and meaning.

Gadamer was a student of Heidegger and he took over from Heidegger left off. He accepted the ontological turn in hermeneutics and further investigated its consequences and impart on our understanding of the human sciences. He relied on Vico and the neo-Aristotelian strands of early modern humanism in his investigations. Thus, his work was considered as 'hermeneutics humanism.'

4.0 Conclusion

Hermeneutics is the theory of understanding, interpretation and application. It is traced to the Greek mythological god – Hermes, who is known as the messenger between the gods and between the deities and humans. It developed through the middle ages and the renaissance into a fundamental branch of biblical studies and took a philosophical dimension with German romanticism and idealism. Through the works of Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, Luther, Gadamer and others, it developed into a full blown philosophical theory about how to transform society through accurate understanding and interpretation.

5.0 Summary

- Philosophical hermeneutics is a theory of understanding and interpretation.
- It took a philosophical turn in German romanticism and idealism.
- Some of its major figures are include: Martin Heidegger and Hans Gadamer.

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

- What is philosophical hermeneutics?
- Trace the historical development of philosophical hermeneutics.
- Identify and outline the views of some of the major figures in philosophical hermeneutics.

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Unit 4: EXISTENTIALISM, PHENOMENOLOGY AND HERMENEUTICS: A SYNTHESIS

Contents

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)
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 - 3.1 Existentialism. Phenomenology and Hermeneutics: A Synthesis.
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1.0 Introduction

This unit simply analyses the relationship among existentialism, phenomenology and hermeneutics. It tries to explain to the students the interconnectedness between the three philosophical methods and why they are often grouped and studied together. Existentialism focuses attention on human existence and tries to unravel and understand the condition of the human person in the world. To achieve this, existentialists employ the phenomenological method which is a theory about understanding the essence of phenomenon. That is, acquiring the knowledge of things as they are in themselves. Philosophical hermeneutics is vital in the accurate understanding of things as it is the theory of understanding and interpretation.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes

At the end of this unit, the student will understand that:

1. Existentialism, phenomenology and hermeneutics are closely related as philosophical methods and theories.

3.0 Main Contents

The primary content of this unit is to analyse and espouse the connection between existentialism, phenomenology and hermeneutics as philosophical methods and theories. Therefore, it focuses on the synthesis of the three philosophical methods.

3.1 Existentialism, Phenomenology and Hermeneutics: A Synthesis

According to Richard Bernstein, the central claim in Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is that understanding, interpretation and application go together. In other words, philosophical hermeneutics does not separate these three aspects in the knowledge of things because they are not independent and therefore, should not be considered as different sub-disciplines.

The understanding of the human condition in the world—existence, is the central theme of existentialism. Existentialism directs attention to the fact of human existence and makes postulations on how to confront the various issues and problems related to the human person and the fulfilment of his being. To achieve this, existentialists adopt the phenomenological method. The phenomenological method is about evolving an appropriate methodology to study and attain knowledge of the essences of phenomena. The goal is to arrive at the knowledge of things as they are in themselves which the likes of Kant had earlier dismissed as impossible.

It is common to see some great names like Heidegger's cutting across the theories of existentialism, phenomenology and hermeneutics. This is so because of the interconnectedness between these movements and thoughts. Bernstein's submission above, in a subtle way, points to this interconnection. Thoughts in these movements intersect because they are all about understanding, interpretation and application.

According to Robert Solomon, "twentieth century existentialism has been greatly influenced by the method known as phenomenology, originated by Edmund Husserl and pursued into existential realm by his student Martin Heidegger" (2000:187). Husserl's phenomenological method is about finding and examining the essential structure of experience with the aim of establishing universal truths that are necessary for basic consciousness. Heidegger tapped into this method and applied it to questions about the nature of human life. These questions range from the meaning of life to the nature and implication of death.

For instance, Heidegger replaced the Cartesian idea of the *cogito ergo sum*—I think, therefore, I am, with the notion of *Dasein*. *Dasein* is Heidegger's notion of man as a being-in-the-world which translates as 'being there' and therefore, equivalent to existentialists' conception of 'existence.' *Dasein* is very fundamental to Heidegger's existentialist philosophy. It implies the rejection of consciousness as separate from the world in which we find ourselves. Thus, Heidegger's preoccupation was to deal with the ontological problem of *Dasein*; namely, to find out who we are and what we are to do with ourselves.

Nietzsche describes this as ‘how to become what we are.’ Within the foregoing context, phenomenology is for Heidegger, a method that helps us to disclose our being which he describes as the world-disclosive.

Sartre equally adopts the phenomenological method to expound his existentialist idea. He uses phenomenology to defend the thesis that human beings are essentially free. Although he did not quite agree with Heidegger on the rejection of the Cartesian *cogitio* as it relates to consciousness, he, instead, argues that consciousness is ‘being-for-itself,’ free to choose and free to negate the given features of the world. By this, Sartre means that whether we are cowardly or shy, or whether we are courageous and bold depends on how we choose to behave; and we can always also choose to change our cowardly/shy or courageous/bold behaviour.

Concerning situations that are beyond our control, for instance, whether we are Nigerian or Ghanaian, white or coloured, crippled or blind, Sartre insists that the question is always open to what we make of the situation. For instance, whether we resign to the situation or make the best out of it positively are alternatives open to us and the choice depends on us. There is always a room for a choice between these alternatives.

The application of the phenomenological method to existentialism found its way into hermeneutics in the works of Gadamer. Gadamer was a student of Heidegger, and like Heidegger took off from where Husserl, his masters stopped, so too Gadamer took after Heidegger his master. Gadamer uses the ontological paradigm of Heidegger and evolved what he described as ‘hermeneutic humanism.’ Herein, he explores the consequences of the ontological turn in hermeneutics in the understanding of the human sciences; he elaborates Heidegger’s idea that everything about knowing involves understanding and interpretation.

According to Gadamer, the theory of understanding and interpretation is not just about procedures and methods that are governed by rules in order to achieve objectivity in the human sciences. It also involves fundamental skills that are manifest in the actions of human beings who are self-conscious linguistic animals. These skills and how they are exercised provide the essential historical character for human existence. The implication of Gadamer’s theorisation is that we gain understanding of others by drawing a relating their words to the world around them. This is what Donald Davidson described later as the ‘radical interpretation.’ In Davidson’s words, “the contents of our thoughts, and so of our very recognition of the words of others and events to which they refer, themselves depend on our sharing with others a pattern of interaction with the world” (George 2020).

There is a clear connection between existentialism, phenomenology and hermeneutics. The three philosophical methods are

4.0 Conclusion

A careful analysis of the subject matter of existentialism, phenomenology and hermeneutics indicates that there is a close relationship between the three as they primarily have to do with the understanding of reality. Existentialism tries to understand human existence and how the individual shapes himself based on his choices in life. Phenomenology is an attempt to understand and gain genuine knowledge of reality outside our presuppositions and biases. Hermeneutics is a theory of understanding through proper interpretation.

5.0 Summary

- Existentialism, phenomenology and hermeneutics share the same concern about genuine understanding of the self, world and reality.
- As philosophical discourses about understanding man, the world and reality, they intersect in their enquiry.

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

- Identify and explain the connection between existentialism, phenomenology and hermeneutics.
- What is the theory of understanding and interpretation according to Gadamer?
- What is the central theme of Existentialism, phenomenology and hermeneutics?

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Module 2: Some Major Themes in Existentialism

Unit 1: Freedom, choice and responsibility

Unit 2: Meaning of life

Unit 3: Man (the individual and society)

Unit 4: Existence vs non-existence of God

Unit 1: Freedom, Choice and Responsibility

Contents

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2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Freedom

3.2 Choice

3.3 Responsibility

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5.0 Summary

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercises

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1.0 Introduction

Freedom, choice and responsibility are inseparable themes; they overlap and intersect with one another, you cannot discuss one without referring to the other. However, in this unit, we shall separate them for proper and clearer analysis to enable easier understanding. Freedom is the right to choose as one wants; thus making choices is an actual concretisation of one's freedom. In other words, to make a choice is to concretely actualise freedom. The ability to make choice comes with the obligation of responsibility because our choices make us accountable for what we do. This unit helps the students to understand the relationship between these notions and how they feature in the existentialist thought.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes

At the end of this unit, the student will understand the following:

1. The meaning of freedom, choice and responsibility.
2. The inherent relationship between freedom, choice and responsibility.
3. The importance of the theme of freedom, choice and responsibility to the existentialist.

3.0 Main Contents

The main contents of this unity are the notions of freedom, choice and responsibility. Herein, we shall explain to the student the meaning of these concepts and point out the inseparable relationship between the three concepts within the context of existentialism. Even though we shall separate the concepts in analysing and discussing their meaning, it will be stressed that they are intricately connected.

3.1 Freedom

Freedom is one of the main themes in existentialism. Freedom is part of the structure of the being of man and therefore, it is a basic condition of his existence. It is not just a property but part of the very structure of man. Man by virtue of his existence is condemned to be free; freedom is identical with his existence and as such it is not something he acquires. An attempt to prove that man is free is an attempt to prove that man exist.

Man's future is not marked out *a priori*, he has a virgin future which he is free to live as he wants. It is like a blank canvass before the artist who is free to paint whatever he wants on it. No indications to direct man's movement into his future, he is free to follow any direction of his choice and therefore shape for himself his life as he wants. He however takes responsibility for whatever choices he makes and whatever directions he decides to take. Thus, he is responsible for whatever he becomes in life (Agidigbi 2006:24). According to Sartre, "... the first step of existentialism is to put the whole man in possession of what he is and to make the total responsibility of his existence to rest on him" (Sartre 1970:24). He further says that "man is condemned to be free. Condemned, because he did not create himself, yet, in other respects he is free; because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does" (Sartre 1977:531).

Freedom is distinguished from accomplishment; that man is free does not mean he always accomplishes whatever he wants to do. Freedom is not 'will to power.' While freedom is the permanent ability to choose, as in, decide for oneself what to do, accomplishment is the realization of what one chooses to do. That one is able to make a choice to be something other than another thing, does not necessarily translate to the fact that one becomes the thing he chooses to be and not the other. This however does not remove the exercise of one's freedom. Therefore, if one is not able to accomplish what he has chosen to do, he would still have exercised his freedom to choose as he makes the choice of what to do.

According to Nyong,

Man's possession of freedom makes him unpredictable, since he can never be identified with anything in particular no identified with any particular way of life. The existentialists' philosophers maintain that man is not and cannot be anything in a fixed, permanent way, since he can always change. Man's freedom puts him above the past, the environment, the rules of language and the dialectics of history. Man by his freedom confers meaning to the world and life itself. Man uses his freedom to designate meaning to things in the world (Nyong 1996:53).

This accounts for man's dynamic nature since he can always be one thing today and another tomorrow. In other words, man can exercise his freedom to choose to be kind-hearted today to X and choose to be cruel tomorrow to X. The idea of freedom permeates every aspect of the human condition for the existentialist. The human person is considered to be fundamentally free ontologically as his very existence implies his freedom. Freedom is closely related to responsibility as the notion of freedom implies assuming responsibility for one's action and/or decisions.

Existentialists believe in human freedom on the basis of the phenomenological description of our daily lives. According to them, in every given situation we find ourselves, there are always a range of possible course of action and nothing compels us to choose one course of action instead of another. Even in what we describe as habitual or automatic actions, we are always free to make choices. Whether we are conscious of it or not, every time we continue to follow a particular course of action, we are renewing our decision freely to follow that course of action. Freedom and choice are intrinsically linked and cannot be separated.

3.2 Choice

Freedom for man is tied to choice. Freedom as the right to choose means that freedom and choice are inseparably bound. Choice is the concrete actualisation of freedom. Freedom compels man to assume responsibility for his life; that is to take his destiny in his hands. Human freedom is freedom to choose and not freedom not to choose. Man chooses what kind of life he wants, we cannot make someone to be the kind of person he does not want to be, therefore, man himself is a choice.

For existentialists, although we are faced with the facticity—given situations of our human existence, we can always transcend the given situations of our lives by taking a stand and making something out of them through our choices. We can make choices because we have free will, our choices are free because even though there are outside factors, they do not determine our will. At any given time, in any given situation, we can always act the otherwise than we did. Therefore, we can always make choices, such that our choices justify moral praise and/or blame.

According to A. A. MacIntyre “if any single thesis could be said to constitute the doctrine of existentialism, it would be that the possibility of choice is the central fact of human nature” (1967:149).

3.3 Responsibility

We can say existentialists ascribe a radical freedom to man, but this radical freedom carries with it a total responsibility with the possibility of an excuse. There are however limitations to human freedom and activities laid on it by history and society. This means there are obstacles to human freedom everywhere. It is notable to immediately add that these obstacles are equally the products of freedom itself. This implies that freedom suffers from its own self-imposed restrictions. These restrictions notwithstanding, man is still free for freedom is identical with his being and existence.

Based on our freedom and the choices we make, existentialists argue that we are responsible for the direction of our lives and the way the world around us appears. Unlike Kant who argued that our experience of reality is partly shaped by the activity of our minds, existentialists insist that we construct reality according to our choices; therefore, we are responsible for how the world around us appears to us.

4.0 Conclusion

The notions of freedom, choice and responsibility are closely related such that you cannot discuss one with reference to the other. For existentialists, the human being is free to make himself whatever he chooses to be and he takes responsibility for the choices he makes. Freedom is identical to human existence and his freedom is not freedom not to choose because the very fact of not choosing is a choice itself, not to choose. Choice is the actualisation of the freedom of the individual, in making choices the individual expresses his freedom.

5.0 Summary

- Freedom is a central theme in existentialism; it is part of the very structure of the human being.
- Freedom is intrinsically related to choice and responsibility. Freedom is the freedom to choose.

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

- Briefly explain the existentialist notion of freedom.
- How is freedom related to choice and responsibility?
- Can freedom be separated from the structure of the human person?

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Unit 2: The Meaning of Life and Death

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1.0 Introduction

For the existentialist, life has no meaning other than what we make of it, hence the existentialist claim that that existence precedes essence which implies that we first exist before we create our essences. Even though existentialism talks about absolute human freedom, it concedes to the criticism that highlight factor that militate against man's freedom, thus, existentialists talk about facticity, anguish—*angst* and death. This unit expatiates on these themes.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes

At the end of this unit, the student will understand the following:

1. The existentialist notion of life and death.
2. Why existentialists emphasis the priority of existence over essence.
3. The factors that assail human existence.

3.0 Main Contents

3.1 The Meaning of Life

Man did not exist before he found himself in the world without his agreement, yet he has to navigate the world and finish his life with death. Consequently, existentialists ask

questions like: What is the meaning of life? Why are we alive? Is it just human destiny to live? Why were we never consulted about whether we want to live or not, about how, where, and when we would be born? These questions disturb our existence and makes us restless. To quell this restlessness, the individual tries to find purpose and meaning in life. Thereby, he creates values for himself that will give meaning to his life.

Every man tries to answer the question about what he lives for. Without an answer to this inquiry, it would be impossible, according to existentialist, for man to live a meaningful life. Therefore, existentialists regard the meaning of life as very important because understanding the meaning of life provides a special value. It gives man a sense of worth and makes man happy.

Bastaman outlines some characteristics of the meaning of life. According to him: (i) The meaning of life is first of all unique and personal for each man. This implies that the meaning of life differs from person to person and even from moment to moment. It cannot be provided by someone for another, each person has to find a meaning for his own life. Each person experiences the world according to his perception or interpretation of the environment he finds himself. For example, while someone may find meaning in buying a car and therefore, struggle to fulfil the purpose to possess a car, another person's purpose may be to travel abroad to live a good life. Each hopes to find satisfaction and happiness in pursuing his purpose.

Secondly, the meaning of life is specific and concrete (Hasbiansyah 2002:252). This means that it may be in simple experiences of daily life, not necessarily only in high or ideal goals like; academic achievement, becoming a big name in politics or in the social circles in the society. Just doing one's job enthusiastically, helping out a friend in need, etc. are simple things that can give meaning to someone's life. Thirdly, the meaning of life helps to provide a direction for man. Finding the meaning of one's life challenges one to fulfil it. It provides man the needed drive to strive and attain his purpose (Bastaman 1994:15).

Existentialists associate three value systems to the search for the meaning of life: (i) creative values, (ii) experiential values, and (iii) attitudinal values. Creative values manifest in productive activities wherein we give something to life through our actions. Experiential values manifest in our acceptance of something from the world; when we enjoy our experiences, like, finding joy and happiness in watching movies and listening to music. Attitudinal values are about us facing each situation in life patiently and courageously. Our attitudes to situations are expressions of our efforts to find meaning in life (Hasbiansyah 2002:252). The attempt to achieve our purpose in life is tied to our meaning of life. When we have a purpose that we strive to achieve, it makes our life meaningful.

3.2 Existence Precedes Essence

In relation to the meaning of life, existentialism espouses the precedence of existence to essence—existence precedes essence. This means that the most important consideration for the individual is the fact that he or she first exists as an individual before he/she works out a purpose in life for him or herself. Existentialism employs the notion of existence to characterise the metaphor of human life. The human being exists as a unique creature that is fully aware of his existence as different from other creatures (Tafsir 1990:192). Unlike other creatures in the world that just exist or are alive, man exists and encounters the world by realising the objects he deals with in the world. He tries to understand everything he experiences and tries to recognise his environment (Hasbiansyah 2002:250). Man is both a subject and the centre of his activity as he is “both a player of life stage and a seeker of identity and meaning” (Hasbiansyah 2002:250).

By existence here we mean an agent that acts independently and is responsibly conscious of his being, and essence refers to roles, labels, stereotypes, definitions, or other preconceived categories that the individual fits into. Without the actual life of the individual, we cannot talk about his true essence, meaning that the actual life of the individual constitutes what we call his true essence.

Human beings through their own consciousness create their own values and determine a meaning to their life. Thus, the individual person defines himself or herself. The individual wishes to be something, this something can be anything, and then be the thing. The phrase, ‘existence precedes essence’ means that a person decides by his or her own actions for which he or she is responsible what he or she wants to be. For instance, when someone acts cruelly towards another, by virtue of the cruel act he or she is defined as a cruel person. By this very action of cruelty, the person is responsible for his or her identity as a cruel person. The implication of this argument is that, it is not gene or human nature that bestows on the individual his or her identity. The human person is neither cruel nor good, for instance, essentially, he or she makes a choice to act in a way that defines him or her as cruel or good. Thus, man exists first, encounters himself and the world and then defines himself afterwards. The implication of placing existence before essence by existentialists is to emphasise the fact that the human being creates himself – makes himself into whatever he becomes, and that he is solely responsible for his own existence.

3.3 Facticity

This refers to the limiting factors of human existence. Many writers criticise the existentialists for ascribing absolute freedom to man despite the physiological and

psychological factors, environmental constitutions and conditions of human birth, to mention a few, that determine the situations in man's life for which he cannot take responsibilities. These factors militate against human freedom and man cannot therefore, be held wholly responsible for all he does.

The above criticism forces Sartre and other existentialists to concede to each man his facticity. Facticity has to do with the awareness of man's finitude; his inability to know beyond what he can know. It deals with the limiting factors of human existence. Man is not the author of his life but he is forced to take responsibility for his mode of being. He is thrown into the world and he has to contend with death, decay, sickness, disappointments, sorrow and incapacitations. These constitute limitations to man's freedom; they constitute the facticity of human existence. Sartre contends that facticity is psychological limitations we impose on ourselves and that we exist authentically by surmounting these facticities.

According to Sartre, man is thrown into the world without consultation; he is just a person and no other, he is of a particular sex and not the other, race, colour, heredity, intelligence quotient, temperament, of a particular historical situation, etc. This makes man limited and empty. He carries the emptiness within himself and tries, often in vain, all through his life to fill this emptiness. Facticity therefore, leaves man a victim who exists without knowing where he comes from and where he is going to.

That man does not know where he is coming from and where he is going to is highly contestable in the face of religious faiths, mythologies and beliefs in creation that try to establish the origin of man as an article of faith. No matter what the disputes may be on this issue, the fact remains according to W. Desan, "that we are thrown into the world without explanation or justification, that we are in a way abandoned" (1954:108).

Facticity explains the limits and boundaries that we cannot go beyond or transcend, it does not however stop us from making efforts to overcome our shortcomings, so as to take control and charge over them. This will in turn enable us reach the full realisation of our essence and being. Therefore, J. F. Donceel writes: "But this [facticity] does not rob me of initiative or freedom. But it sets down a framework within which my liberty will have to be exercised" (1967:458). This expresses the fact that man has no unlimited possibility; instead, his possibility is limited by the situation of his facticity.

3.4 Anguish

Anguish or its German equivalent—*angst* is a theme that is common to all existentialists and it comes across as one of the characteristic features of human existence. It refers to the

uneasiness that man faces whenever he has to make a decision. It comes with reflection on the absurdities, nothingness and finality of human existence. It is something that is borne out of the fact of choice. Man's awareness and realisation of his freedom to choose between alternatives makes him apprehensive of the responsibilities that go with his freedom of choice. According to Heidegger, *angst* "provides the phenomenal basis for explicitly grasping *Dasein's* primordial totality of being" (1962:182). *Dasein* is a German word that is very fundamental to Heidegger's existentialist philosophy. It means "being there" or "presence." It is translated as "existence" in English. In Heidegger's usage, it describes the peculiar way of being characteristic of the human being. For Sartre, anguish is a sense of "complete and profound responsibility [which a person feels, when] fully realising that he is not only choosing what he will be, but ... deciding for the whole of mankind" (2007:30). Sartre is careful not to interpret anguish as fear because they are not the same thing for existentialist.

Anguish and fear is not the same thing. While the object of anguish lies within; it is in the nature of man, the object of fear is outside of man; fear is caused by an external thing. For instance, when we are afraid, it is always of something outside of us that we are afraid of. Anguish is the recognition of a possibility as our possibility. It is not avoidable and cannot be hidden. The anguish of man in his decision making process is not because he is free to choose but because he is responsible for his choice.

3.4 Death

For existentialists, death reveals the authentic possibilities of human existence. They discuss death as a continuation of anguish because for them, anguish arises in relation to death. Heidegger writes that "being-towards-death is essentially anguish" (1962:266). This means that even though death is not the object of anguish, the realisation of the prospect of death gives rise to anguish. Therefore, we can understand anguish as the fear of death. There are three reasons why existentialists think that the phenomenon of death gives rise to anguish.

- i. A person's finitude is at least a necessary condition for his freedom and individuality.
- ii. Attention to a particular aspect of a person's fate after death throws into sharper relief how things stand with him when alive.
- iii. The anticipation of death utterly individualises *Dasein*.

Reason (iii) is most important to the existentialist. For him, a person becomes an individual when he withdraws from getting swallowed or immersed in the crowd or the world of the

others; this leads him to wholeness and integrity of life. For existentialists, as expressed by Heidegger, when we anticipate death, we are wrenched away from the 'they' and are liberated from the lostness to the crowd. When we are lost in the crowd, accidental possibilities are thrown at us, when we get freed from the crowd in anticipation of death, we attain relief.

Existentialists are not concerned about the nature or manner of death, rather, they are interested in the fact that it indicates clearly the finitude of existence. It clearly points to the fact that existence comes to an end. Consequently, rather being concerned about the event of death itself, existentialists are concerned about human life in relation to the prospect of the event of death. Death is an existential phenomenon according to Heidegger. For him, "when we speak of death, it does not signify *Dasein's* Being-at-an-end ... but a *Being-towards-the-end* ... death is a way to be" (1962:245).

For the existentialist, death gives meaning to life. According to Montaigne, as recorded in S. De Beauvoir, "the continuous work of life is to build death" (1948:7). For Karl Jasper, death is "throwing us back upon the fulfilment of *Existenz*" (1969:200). Thus, existentialists opine that death is responsible for giving meaning to existence. We should not confuse this with the Christian understanding of death as the gateway to a better life in the presence of God. Death is finitude for existentialists; it is the final end (termination) of life. Death has meaning because it is the final end of life.

4.0 Conclusion

The many questions that man is confronted with in regards to his existence makes man search for the meaning of life. For the existentialists, man has to find the meaning for his life because it gives him a special value and makes him achieve happiness. Related to finding the meaning of life, existentialists discuss the following themes: (i) human existence as preceding his essence because man exists first before he fashions his own destiny through his choices. (ii) Facticity, (iii) Anguish, and (iv) Death.

5.0 Summary

- Man is thrust into this world without meaning and purpose except the one he fashions for himself.
- Existence precedes essence because man exists first before he fashions out a purpose for himself.
- Human life and freedom are limited by the facticity of his existence and the phenomenon of death.

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

- Outline the existentialists notion of life and its meaning.
- Describe how existence precedes essence.
- Trace the relationship between life, facticity, anguish and death.

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Unit 3: Man and society

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1.0 Introduction

In this unit, we shall discuss the relationship between man and the world and other human beings in the world. The existentialist themes here are man, man and the world, and man and others. In this themes we shall be provided with an insight into the existentialist notion of man versus society.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes

At the end of this unit, the student will understand the following:

1. The existentialist notion of man.
2. The relationship between man and the world.
3. The relationship between man and other members of the society.

3.0 Main Contents

3.1 Man

By man here, we mean the human being as an individual. According to existentialists, man is a self-transcending being, which means that man can rise above himself. He is a conscious being who always projects into the future; he goes beyond his present looking into and projecting into the future. Existentialism contends that man should be the central focus of philosophy; he is not to be thought of in terms of his essence or as a form as Plato's philosophy argued. Man is what he is according to how he makes himself. Against Plato's

idea that a man is a man by virtue of his participation in *manness* as in the world of forms, existentialism argues that man is a self-creating being. He first exists, and then makes himself what he is because existence precedes essence.

Existentialism places possibilities over necessities. It sees man's existence as a possibility and in this possibility lies reality, that is the reality of man. Sartre argues that things, events, persons and their relations present themselves as possibilities and not as necessities.

Man is a unique individual who is a self-conscious-being. He has his own irreversible history and he is not replaceable in the society. He also has an interiority that cannot be penetrated but can only be accessed by him. His self-consciousness and impenetrable interiority constitute his subjectivity. This view protests against man's conception of himself as strictly a member of the society who believes society makes him what he is. To think that society makes you what you are is to fail to see yourself as an individual who must determine his own destiny; and determine what he wants to be. If one thinks of oneself just a member of the society one is allowing himself to drift with and be drifted by the majority—crowd; this makes one anonymous and lost in the crowd and at loss with the crowd. The implication for the individual is that he cannot decide matters or issues on his own, he allows issues to be decided on the basis of majority opinion. This makes man unable to stand out in any unusual way. This further implies that man becomes simply a machine in the hands of society.

To avoid making man a machine in the hands of society, existentialists express antipathy towards the anonymous featureless standards which prevail in society. Hence they feel the need for a philosophy that is directed towards the internal edification of the individual self. This will be a kind of personalist philosophy. Such a personalist philosophy will conceive man as a self-transcending being who goes beyond what he is at the moment and looks towards the future; this makes him different from other beings. He is self-conscious, lives a unique life that is irreplaceable—lives his life and dies his death. Man is not an objectifiable subject or fixed entity, he is an individual who is responsible for his decisions and actions.

3.2 Man and Others

Existentialism maintains that the existence of the individual necessarily implies the existence of others, for the individual cannot exist without the others. This means that man is not only a being-in-the-world but also a being-with-others. A being-in-the-world is used by existentialists, especially Heidegger, to describe a state of living with a highly meaningful orientation aimed at achieving personal growth. A being-for-others expresses

the dimension of being in which the self exists as an object for others—orientated towards others in society.

Although existentialism, like Cartesianism, emphasises individual subjectivity, it however, unlike Cartesianism, insists that awareness of self is not in isolation; for when a man discovers himself, he also discovers the world and the others. According to Sartre, “in the *cogito* one does not discover only oneself but others as well ... thus, the man who attains himself directly through the *cogito*, discovers all others also” (See Omoregbe 2001:44).

Existentialists stress the social nature of man as a being-with-others, while maintaining man’s individuality, singularity and uniqueness. This implies that the individual should not allow himself to be lost in the crowd of the ‘they.’ In the light of this, existentialists make a distinction between authentic and inauthentic existence.

The authentic life is the life lived by the free choice of the individual. Herein the individual is fully aware of his own freedom, which enables him to make choices and assume full responsibility for his choices. It implies that the individual should not simply drift along with the crowd; a situation where he does things because others are doing them or just because it is the custom of the place. Authenticity therefore, preserves the individual identity from the erosion societal influences and demands. On the contrary, the inauthentic life is the life lived according to the dictates of another man. In this case, the individual is not living his life but the life dictated to him by the other person. Inauthenticity denies the individual liberty as he dances to the tune of society without questioning their validity.

According to Martin Buber, the very fact of the individual coming into the world is tantamount to coming into being-with-others. Therefore, as he realises himself as an individual, he equally realises the others. This expresses the social nature of man with other beings. Life is meaningful in relation to the others as our actions only make meaning as they relate and affect other people (Nyong, 1996:50).

3.3 Man and the World

Here existentialism is concerned with the relationship between man and the world. Existentialists evaluate the world in the light of an examination of the relationship of the being in the world and not in the light of knowledge or perception. For the existentialists, the existence of the world is a matter of course and man and the world are inseparable. This is because as a conscious and existent being, man does not exist in a vacuum; man is a part of the world and cannot exist without the world. The reality of the world is attached to the existence of man, who perceives the world as the existence of man is attached to the world

in which he lives. Man is just not a thing in the world; he is an inseparable part of the world. Within this context, the existentialists see the attempt to prove the existence of the world as a scandal. A failure to prove the existence of the world will be a contradiction, while to succeed in proving that the world exists will be tautologous since the very existence of man presupposes the existence of the world. Even to use the phrase, 'external world' is unacceptable to existentialists since such a phrase makes the world autonomous and an objective reality apart from man. Man, the thinker, is and should be made part of the object of thought. While science sees man as a disinterested observer and objective spectator, philosophy should adopt the sharply different methodology of making man a part and parcel of the world that he observes and perceives.

The question of proving the existence of the world should not be raised at all as it is a given – man who raises the question of the existence of the world is part and parcel of the world, he does not exist except within the universe. Thus, the very fact of man's existence already presupposes the existence of the world. Existence for existentialists is having one's being as a human individual in the world (Nyong 1996:43). Though the individual is self-conscious, his consciousness is a consciousness of something and it *ipso facto* implies a world in general. The human mode of being necessarily implies a world.

According to Heidegger, man is a being-in-the-world. He does not become aware of himself alone, but becomes aware of himself in the world and controlled by the world. The world is not independent of those who talk about it; it includes the point of view of the person who is talking about it and the totality of his environment as he is aware of it (Macquarrie 1983:79). The world is a necessary constituent of existence; no world, no existence. Without the world there is no self and to exist is to be in a world and stand out from the world. As Sartre puts it, there is no world without selfhood and without the world there is no selfhood (1956:104).

The body is the link between man and the world since it is through the body that man comes in contact with the world as well as interacts with the world. Though it is true that humans exist in the world, they however transcend the world. There is the tendency for man to be completely absorbed in the world, man should resist this tendency. If he does not, he ceases to exist as man and becomes just a thing, an article or object among other objects surrounding him in the world. Man gives the world its value and meaning as the world exist for man and man uses it as a means for self-fulfilment. The human being lives in the world; he finds a home in the world and cares for the world. The being of man is fundamentally constituted in the world to which he as man is inextricably and unavoidably bound.

The world is always a world of man since it receives its meaning and interpretative reality from man; to talk about the world is to talk about man at the same time. The expression 'world' implies the human stand-point from which everything is seen. Man therefore, cannot be considered in isolation from the world or *vice versa*. Man realises his being as 'being-in-the-world' therefore, we can say that man and the world are in a mutualistic symbiosis (Nyong 1996:47). Man and the world form a totality in which they are related to each other by a series of 'in-order-to'.

4.0 Conclusion

Man by nature is a social being and necessarily lives in the world. Therefore, existentialists see an intrinsic connection between man and the world, and between man and others in the world. Man is a self-transcending being who consciously projects into the future. He is a being-in-the-world who, in his authentic life is not lost in the crowd, in the sense that he freely makes his own choice as an individual. While it is the case, for existentialists that the existence of the individual necessarily implies the existence of others, the individual would be living an inauthentic life if he allows himself to be drifted by others and the crowd. Authentic living preserves the identity of the individual from being eroded by societal influences and demands.

5.0 Summary

- Man is a self-transcending being.
- Man is a being-in-the-world
- Man is a being-for-others.

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

- What do existentialists mean when they describe man as a self-transcending being?
- Analyse the notions of 'being-in-the-world' and 'being-for-others'.
- Existentialism maintains that the existence of the individual necessarily implies the existence of others explain?

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Unit 4: Existence vs Non-existence of God

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1.0 Introduction

The question of the existence and non-existence of God in existentialism is best understood within the context of theistic and atheistic existentialism. While theistic existentialism is concerned with the choices of the individual in relation to a divinity—God, which implicitly means that they believe in the existence of God, atheistic existentialism is concerned with the choices of the individual in a Godless universe; by implication, they do not believe in the existence of God. In this unit, we shall identify some of the existentialists in both divide and analyse the positions of both forms of existentialism.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes

This unit shall enable the student understand the following:

1. Identify theistic and atheistic existentialists.
2. The position of theistic existentialists in relation to the existence of God and the self-actualisation of man.
3. The argument of atheistic existentialists against the existence of God.

3.0 Main Contents

3.1 Theistic Existentialism

Existentialism is not a mass of doctrines; rather, it is an approach in philosophical enterprise that emphasises the fact that man has to take charge of his own existence by

concretely living, acting and making choices (Macquarrie 1963:351). There are many philosophers who fall under the existentialist camp and these philosophers are broadly divided into two sub-camps. These sub-camps under existentialism include: the theistic existentialists and the atheistic existentialists. Theistic existentialists believe in the existence of God and they are the subject of this present discussion.

Theistic existentialism follows the general principles of existentialism and emphasises the existentialist themes of freedom, choice, self-actualisation, concrete living and so on. However, it differs from the other strand of existentialism which is atheistic existentialism by the very fact that it allows for and emphasises the role of God in man's concrete existence. Theistic existentialism is a type of existentialism which posits that human existence is meaningful insofar as it involves personal relationship with God. This suggests that this relationship with God is not merely a collective affair but the result of personal choice and freedom.

Existentialists generally stress on the importance of coursing one's own existence by making one's own decisions and judgment instead of following popular opinions and going along with the crowd (Haring 1969:21-22). For theistic existentialism, the individual's decision and choice ought to lead him ultimately to a personal love and appreciation of God and this is what facilitates self-actualisation.

The theistic existentialists like other existentialist, criticise philosophers like Hegel for their abstract philosophy which takes attention away from human situations and problems. "The theistic existentialists thus strive to overcome human alienation by the rediscovery of the world of personal communion with other persons and with God" (Copleston 1963:174). This effort can be seen in the works of various theistic existentialists; prominent among whom are: Søren Kierkegaard and Karl Jaspers.

It would be difficult to talk about theistic existentialism without making reference to Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard was a 19th century philosopher but his thoughts on existentialism gained wave in the 20th century, long after his death. He gave three stages in the actualisation of individual. The first stage is the aesthetic stage. In this stage, we have those who lack continuity in their lives and desire to partake in all experiences. They make no commitments and are in a sense, ruled by their desires. They have freedom but they end up in despair. The second stage is the ethical stage. This is an improvement from the aesthetic stage. In this stage, man is characterised by "subordination to the universal, that is, the universal moral law with its claims and all" (Copleston 1963:151). At this stage, one does not attain self-realisation because it is impersonal. The last stage is the religious stage. At this stage, there is a personal relation to the supreme and absolute God. This relation is

fostered by faith. For Kierkegaard, this is the stage where self –realisation takes place. He further opines that movement through these stages is based on the individual’s choice. We shall further elucidate this issue when we discuss the contributions of Kierkegaard to existentialism later.

Karl Jaspers does not stray far away from the thoughts of Kierkegaard. He opines that man stands in relation to the external world and to transcendence, that is, God (Macquarrie 1963:356-357). Thus, man must not limit himself to secular existence but must reach out to God with his instrument of faith.

In the thoughts of these philosophers, we can deduce the major thesis of theistic existentialism which is essentially that, “the highest self-actualisation of the individual is the relating of oneself to God, not as the universal, absolute thought, but as the absolute thou” (Copleston 1963:341). ‘Absolute Thou’ as used here, is an expression prominent in the works of Gabriel Marcel, another theistic existentialist, and he uses it to refer to God as the absolute subject of reality instead of a mere thought or idea in our minds. For Marcel, “there is a set of profound human experiences that reveal the presence of God (the ‘Absolute Thou’) in human life” (Treanor and Sweetman 2021:14). These are experiences that are present in the lives of most human beings but not all human beings connect them to the affirmation of God.

3.2 Atheistic Existentialism

Atheistic existentialism is the strand of existentialism that tries to remove the idea of the transcendence from the existence of man in the world. It is the removal of transcendental, metaphysical, or religious beliefs from existentialist thoughts. This means the exclusion of the idea of God from existential issues. This is a direct opposite to theistic existentialism, which sees the realisation of the potentials of man, while making recourse to transcendence and metaphysical realities – God and other transcendental beings. It is a critique of theistic existentialism.

There are many notable figures in atheistic existentialism. Very prominent among them is Friedrich Nietzsche in the German philosophical tradition, and Jean Paul Sartre in the French Philosophical tradition. Another notable atheistic existentialist is Albert Camus. Nietzsche is known for his “Will to Power,” and Camus is known for his idea of “the Absurd.” These scholars are renowned for their push for the denial of the idea of the existence of God to enable an unhindered realisation of the potentials of man. We shall consider the thoughts of Nietzsche and Sartre to get an over view of atheistic existentialism.

Atheistic existentialism aims at freeing man from the claws of universal moral codes and obligations – absolute freedom. For someone like Nietzsche, once God is dead then we can realise the goal of freeing man from universal moral goals and obligations and the individual shall freely exercise his absolute freedom. His existentialism is traced to his popular phrase “God is dead.” This statement according to him is a statement from the position of the man whom the idea of the revealed God is no longer valid (Copleson 1956:175). Such a man is free to attain his self-realisation. Nietzsche “portrays the radical finitude of man” (Languilli 1975:18). This picture of man given by Nietzsche is that of absolute freedom – a unique individual. This is because according to Jim Unah and Chris Osegenwune, “Nietzsche observes, there is a predominance of universal opinion and a calculated campaign to silence unique individuals” (Unah and Osegenwune 2010:130). The use of ‘universal opinion’ here is likened to universal moral principles that are laid down for man to make recourse to. According to Nietzsche and other atheistic existentialists, God is the one that wills these moral norms, which must be obeyed by all. In the case where this idea of God continues to exist, man would not be able to do things independently and individually. Nietzsche projected the idea of the “absolute superman.” This is the idea of a man who is able to wield power and do things his own without recourse to any external force.

Another prominent atheistic existentialist is Jean Paul Sartre. Sartre avers that the individual ultimately creates his own values and his own moral laws for which he takes total responsibility. He is not accountable to any God because there is no Go. Thus, Sartre advocates a total elimination of appeal to transcendence in the activities and the actualisation of the potentials of man. Anything that prevents man’s self-realisation should not be allowed; self-realisation should be unbridled because there are no transcendental values, neither are there universally-obligatory moral law. The implication of this denial of the existence of God is that man becomes the foundation of his own values. Recourse therefore, is not to be made to any force external to man. The individual in this case should act morally, but not bound by universal moral laws. He lives in loneliness and creates his world of values.

Atheistic existentialism pushes for the absolute freedom of man. This push is captured in Sartre’s claim that “if man is free, there is no God, and if there is God, then man is not free.” We infer from this claim that the idea of the existence of God limits the freedom of man. For the atheistic existentialist, man must not be limited by anything; he should only be conformed to the codes that he sets for himself. This is the hallmark of absolute freedom. This idea of absolute freedom is a major drive in the existential thoughts of Nietzsche, Sartre and the other atheistic existentialists.

Since existence precedes essence according to existentialists, man exists as nothing in the first place. The essence of man, that is, what man becomes in the world, is greatly dependent on the efforts of man because, in the first place, there is no essence in man since there is no God to conceive it. The essence of man is hinged on what he conceives and wills to be. In sum, atheistic existentialism is all about the absolute freedom of man who lives and is able to gain essence without influence or any recourse to transcendence.

4.0 Conclusion

Theistic existentialism championed by Kierkegaard, Jaspers and Marcel, and atheistic existentialism championed by Nietzsche and Sartre denote the position of existentialism on the existence and non-existence of God. Apparently some existentialists believe that God exists and argue that man self-realisation and actualisation is attained in relation to God. On the other hand, some existentialists either do not believe that God exists or claim that God is dead. Their argument is hinged on the absoluteness of human freedom who creates his own essence in the exercise of his freedom through the choices he makes.

5.0 Summary

- Existentialists are divided on whether God exists or not. For some (theistic existentialists) God exists, for others (atheistic existentialists) God does not exist.
- Theistic existentialists argue that man's self-realisation is attained in his relation to the transcendence – God.
- Atheistic existentialists argue that the existence of God is a limitation to man's absolute freedom, since man is absolutely free, it means there is no God.

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

- Identify some existentialists according to their position on the existence and non-existence of God.
- How do theistic existentialists explain the existence of God?
- What is the argument of atheistic existentialists against the existence of God?

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Module 3: Key Figures in existentialism

- Unit 1: Søren Kierkegaard
- Unit 2: Friedrich Nietzsche
- Unit 3: Jean-Paul Sartre
- Unit 4: Martin Heidegger
- Unit 5: Martin Buber

Unit 1: Søren Kierkegaard

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1.0 Introduction

In this unit, you shall be introduced to the person and existentialist thoughts of Søren Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard was a Christian existentialist who is considered as the father of existentialism because he is credited with articulating the fundamental themes of existentialism. He postulated three stages of human development towards the attainment of the authentic self.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes

At the end of this unit, the student will be familiar with the following:

1. The person of Søren Kierkegaard
2. The existentialist thoughts of Kierkegaard

3.0 Main Contents

3.1 Introduction to Søren Kierkegaard

Søren Aabye Keirkegaard (1813 – 1855) was born on May 5, 1813 and he died November 11, 1855. He was a Danish Christian philosopher, theologian and social critic whose works influenced Martin Heidegger, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Jacques Derrida, Gabriel Marcel, Martin Buber, and many others. He was a profound and prolific writer whose works crossed the boundaries of philosophy, theology, psychology, literary criticism, devotional literature and fiction (McDonald 2017). He made very original contributions to these disciplines.

Kierkegaard's life was not eventful, he did not travel much outside his home town of Copenhagen; record has it that he travelled only five times – four times to Berlin, and once to Sweden. He was fond of attending the theatre and chatting with people along the streets as he takes regular walks around the town. He studied at the Copenhagen University where he studied philosophy and theology. He was very critical of Hegel's abstract philosophy and his own works were reflected in his life; "his life was the source of many of his preoccupations and repetitions within his *oeuvre*. Because of his existentialist orientation, most of his interventions in contemporary theory do double duty as means of working through events from his own life" (McDonald 2017).

Kierkegaard was greatly influenced by his father, from whom he inherited his melancholy, sense of guilt and anxiety, pietistic emphasis on the dour aspects of Christian faith. He equally inherited his father's positives, like, his talents for philosophical argument and creative imagination. He also inherited a lot of wealth from his father that enabled him to sponsor himself as a freelance writer.

Kierkegaard was the first to express many of the themes of contemporary existentialism. Amongst his works are: *Fear and Trembling, Either – Or, Philosophical Fragments. Stages on Life's Way*, and *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. He opined that the Christian faith, as it is practiced, had lost its way because of the religious dogmatism that had become prevalent. According to him, the relationship of human beings with God must be hard-won, in the sense that it must be matter of devotion and suffering. By this he means that a person becomes committed and responsible when he makes difficult decisions and sacrifices. For him, the human life is paradoxical and absurd. The human being becomes truly human, if and when he confronts the absurdities.

Keikegaard's philosophy is considered a reaction to Hegel's attempt to bring the whole of reality, human beings inclusive, within his conceptual system. As far as Hegel was concerned, a thing is only meaningful if it is a part of a whole, nothing viewed in isolation

of the whole is real but an illusion. Keirkegaard found Hegel's philosophy comical because in his great efforts to capture all of reality in his system of thought, he left out the most important element of existence. According to Samuel Stumpf, "what made Hegel comic for Kierkegaard was that this great philosopher had tried to capture all of reality in his system of thought, yet in the process lost the most important element, namely, *existence*" (1989:476).

3.2 Kierkegaard's Existentialism

Keirkegaard treated the term existence as a word reserved for the individual human beings. To exist is to be a certain kind of individual who strives and considers alternatives; he chooses, decides, and commits himself to his choices and decisions. Neither choice, nor decisions, nor commitments were implied in the works of Hegel. This omission of Hegel led Keirkegaard to reject systematisation and objectivity in favour of subjectivity. He considered objectivity as impersonal and subjectivity as personal. Subjectivity being personal entails self-commitment. According to Stumpf, "Kierkegaard's whole career might well be considered as a self-conscious revolt against abstract thought and an attempt on his part to live up to Feuerbach's admonition: 'Do not wish to be a philosopher in contrast to being a man...do not think as a thinker...think as a living, real being...think in Existence'." (1989:476-477).

Keirkegaard considers truth as subjectivity since truth is bound to existential appropriation. According to him, "for existing, striving, deciding persons there is not available 'out there' a pre-fabricated truth" (Stumpf 1989:479). In his opinion, what is out there is "an objective uncertainty." This seems more like an anticipation of William James view of "truth is made." For him, the important question about truth is whether it is true for me and am I prepared to live by it and commit myself to it rather than whether it is objective or not. He considers 'personal choice', 'freedom', 'commitment', 'personal responsibility', etc. as key terms. The point Keirkegaard is making here is that people should realise what it means to exist and be a Christian.

In his description of the existential situation of man, Keirkegaard distinguishes between man's present estate, which is what he is now, and what he ought to be, or what he is essentially. He therefore, argues for a movement in the life of man from the essential to the existential; that is from what he ought to be to what he is now. The essential nature of man involves his relation to the infinite, which is God, thus, the existential nature of man is a consequence of his alienation from the infinite—God. Alienation from God arises from the individual losing himself in the crowd. The crowd for Keirkegaard is 'untruth' and it makes

the individual impenitent and irresponsible. This is irrespective of the kind of crowd; be it a rich or poor crowd, a political crowd or even a church congregation.

In his Christian faith, Kierkegaard sees the individual immersed in the crowd as an attempt by the individual to derive meaning for his existence. This is however a wrong attempt; the right attempt is to relate oneself with God instead of any other thing. In God's eyes, humankind do not constitute a crowd. God sees each individual as an individual within the society. Therefore, man continues to live a life full of anxiety until he actualises his essential self in God. His anxiety is a result of the fact that while he lives existentially he is alienated from his essential self. This alienation in turn creates a dynamic drive in man to discover his essential self. To explain this dynamic drive or movement in the life of man, Kierkegaard outlines three levels or stages of existence; namely, (i) aesthetic stage, (ii) ethical stage, and (iii) religious stage.

The Aesthetic Stage: At this stage man drifts from pleasure to pleasure. He however, soon discovers that life at this level does not produce the authentic self and therefore, would not result into true existence. He is now faced with the 'either – or.' That is, either he remains on the level of aesthetic with its fatal attractions or he moves to the next stage.

The Ethical Stage: Here, man recognises and accepts rules of conduct formulated from reason. He however comes to realise later that he is not capable of fulfilling the moral law, which he finds himself violating deliberately. Conscious of the fact that he deliberately violates the rules of conduct, he develops a sense of guilt, which in turn becomes an antithesis that brings him face to face with the 'either – or' question again. Either he remains with his sense of guilt at the ethical level, or he confronts the new reality; his awareness of the guilt.

The Religious Stage: At this third stage, the individual tries to confront his awareness of his guilt. At this point, he is faced with the reality of the existence of God and the awareness of his self-alienation. Thus, he realises more clearly the need to find self-fulfilment in God. At the religious stage, the individual becomes aware that to become his authentic self he must commit himself to God. The point of Kierkegaard's argument is that authentic existence is not a result of the intellect but rather a matter of faith and commitment. Commitment involves a continuous process of choice making in the face of the varieties of 'either – or.'

This exposé of Kierkegaard's existential thought implies that the individual's freedom is based on his ability to think for himself without necessarily falling back on conventions or institutionalised moral codes of conduct. The individual's freedom is tantamount to

isolation, because he is solely responsible for his decision on how he wants to live. To be free means to be a man of his own, his own master. As his own master, he decides within his own creativity what is valuable and what is not valuable. The authentic man for Kierkegaard is the man who has nothing to do with universal or societal moral codes. His morality is to the extent that he personally discovers the truth (Agidigbi 2006:29-34).

4.0 Conclusion

Søren Kierkegaard who is considered the father of existentialism was the first to articulate the basic themes of existentialism. He was a Christian philosopher who criticised the way Christianity was practiced at his time. He disagreed with the abstract philosophy of Hegel and argued that man's way out of the absurdities of this world is in finding God who infinite. He outlined three stages man's existence by which man discovers his essential self and overcome his alienation. The authentic man, for Kierkegaard, is the man who personally discovers the truth, and not swayed around by societal moral codes.

5.0 Summary

- Kierkegaard is the father of existentialism – he articulated the basic themes of existentialism.
- Man's alienation from the infinite—God is the reason that man is faced with the absurdities in the world.
- There are three stages or levels in man's movement to his authentic self.

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

- List Kierkegaard's most important and influential works.
- Briefly summarise Kierkegaard's existentialist thought.
- Briefly explain Kierkegaard three levels or stages of existence.

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Unit 2: Friedrich Nietzsche

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1.0 Introduction

In this unit, you shall be introduced to the person and existentialist thoughts of Friedrich Nietzsche. He was a German philosopher, cultural critic, composer, poet, writer and philologist. He had profound influence on modern intellectual history.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes

At the end of this unit, the student will be familiar with the following:

1. The person of Friedrich Nietzsche
2. The existentialist thoughts of Nietzsche

3.0 Main Contents

3.1 Introduction to Friedrich Nietzsche

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 – 1900) was born in Röcken, October 15, 1844 to a Lutheran minister. He grew up amongst women – his mother, grandmother, two aunts and younger sister. He had a brilliant academic career that saw him appointed at the tender age of 24 as the chair of classical philology in May 1869 at Basel. He developed interest in the philosophical works of Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Albert Lange.

Nietzsche did not enjoy good health. He always had intense headaches, nausea, and troubling eyesight. These could be due to a tumour that grew slowly on the surface of his brain behind the right eye. Once he collapsed on the street of Turin and on his recovery, he wrote a series of letters that were considered deranged. He suffered from dementia that

eventually lapsed into silence until he died of stroke and complicated pneumonia in 1900 (Anderson 2017).

Nietzsche was a very profound and enigmatic philosopher. He was very controversial and as a philosopher, he was appropriated in various ways; for instance, he was vilified, venerated, and at times, simply misunderstood (Stokes 2012:266). He was a thoroughgoing atheistic existentialist who understood and addressed philosophical issues from the point of view of the conflict of the age rather than the disputes between the various thought systems in the universities. His works were varied and discussed topics ranging from ethics and religion to metaphysics and epistemology. He was renowned for his notion of ‘the power to will.’

3.2 Nietzsche’s Existentialism

Nietzsche opined that the individual’s fundamental driving force is expressed in his need to dominate and control the external forces that prevail on him. Therefore, the individual requires the power to be the master of his own destiny. The failure to realise this urge is responsible for the existence of the various moral systems and religious institutions we have in the world. According to him, these moral systems and religious institutions attempt to subdue and bind the will of man. Thus, he advocated that the power to will must be pursued and affirmed rather than resisted. For him, the power to will is the affirmation of life.

He launched a vehement attack against Christianity as a system that does many deplorable things in the name of God, claiming to hand down the commands and prohibitions of God to man. He argued against absolute objectivity of morality and proposed that there are two kinds of morality; (i) the slave morality, and (ii) the master morality.

The slave morality stems from Christianity. This is the kind of morality that teaches love, meekness, self-denial, etc. It glorifies weakness as a virtue and deprecates strength of character as a vice. The aim of slave morality is basically to bring men to the same level by subjecting them to absolute and universal laws. This is definitely an obstacle to the development of man in the view of Nietzsche.

Against slave morality, Nietzsche pronounced God dead and argued that the death of God is the freedom of man. For him, the death of God sets humanity free of the enslaving and oppressive, absolute and universal commandments and prohibitions, which inhibits human growth and development. With the death of God, the slave morality gives way to the master morality.

The master morality is that of the man who takes over the place of God. He becomes the legislator of moral laws. The man who takes over is the man who has rejected the values of the slave morality and has reversed the values. This is what Nietzsche called the 'transvaluation' of values. In the transvaluation of values, the master morality becomes a morality of power, ruthlessness, struggle and ambition.

The 'superman' is the ideal man who embodies the master morality. The superman is above and beyond good and evil as he creates his own values. Having liberated himself from the enslaving morality of the reign of God, which is tied to the belief in God, he evolves his own values and morality. Dostoevsky had argued that if God is dead, it would mean that all things are now permitted. Nietzsche picked up this implication and developed. According to him, if there are no absolute values since all things are now permitted, each individual must create and develop his own values. This the individual does in relation to the tasks he sets for himself. To pronounce God dead is to reject God as the basis of our values. It implies that man has to source a new basis for his values and he must make himself that new basis of his own values. This implies that man decides for himself what is valuable, what is meaningful, and what is true.

The consequence of the death of God is that the old morality disappears and everything is now permissible. This further reveals nihilism, emptiness, nothingness and meaninglessness in human existence. This gains support in Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal recurrence of all things. This doctrine holds that there is a continuous process of endless repetition of things. Implied in this doctrine is the fact that anything happening now had happened in the past and will happen again in the future. Human existence, for Nietzsche is part and parcel of this eternal recurrence. According to him, it is an "eternal process of endless, purposeless, and meaningless repetition" (Stokes 2012:37). This means human life or existence has no meaning, no purpose, no aim and no goal.

Nietzsche's existentialist philosophy can be interpreted in various ways and forms. Some of such possible interpretations would be:

- i. That it is a philosophy that encourages/teaches violence, brutality, selfishness, immorality and other vices.
- ii. A philosophy that encourages a remarkable drive for man to free himself from any form of bondage.
- iii. A philosophy that attempts to breed the real and authentic man. Authenticity here is used in the sense of not allowing oneself to get drowned in the beliefs of the 'foolish' majority.

Interpretation (iii) may be described as an “emotional crusade” which is needed to launch man into the stage of enlightenment and fast-track him into new possibilities. Man must however, take the responsibility for his actions. In comparison to Kierkegaard, whose efforts was to turn man back to God as an authentic Christian in order to discover and live his existential and essential life to the full, Nietzsche frantically wants man to reject God and chat his own part in order to discover and live his authentic life. For him, man must accept that he is a part of this material world regardless of anything else that exists. Therefore, man must live as if there is nothing else beyond this life. It is only in this way that man can realise his potential by taking risk.

4.0 Conclusion

Nietzsche’s existentialism is in direct opposite to that of Kierkegaard. He was an atheist who believed that God is dead. He advocated the human will to power by which the individual realises and fulfils his potential. He denounced and criticised Christianity as a form of enslavement. Based on his view that God is dead, he advocated the master morality by which man takes over the place of God and create his own values. He used the notion of transvaluation to explain this.

5.0 Summary

- Nietzsche had a troubled life riddled with health issues that final led to his death.
- He pronounced that God is dead and therefore advocated transvaluation of values employing the idea of master morality.
- Nietzsche’s philosophy can be interpreted in three significant ways.

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

- Briefly prepare an account of Nietzsche’s life.
- Explain Nietzsche’s idea that God is dead.
- Explain Nietzsche’s idea of transvaluation of values.

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Unit 4: Martin Heidegger

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1.0 Introduction

In this unit, you shall be introduced to the person and existentialist thoughts of Martin Heidegger. His philosophy was very influential. He argued that the history of philosophy shows that it has been concerned with the wrong questions, like: what there is and what can be known about what is. These questions, according to him presuppose too much of dualism—a system of two essential parts.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes

At the end of this unit, the student will be familiar with the following:

1. The person of Martin Heidegger.
2. The existentialist thoughts of Heidegger

3.0 Main Contents

3.1 Introduction to Martin Heidegger

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) was a German philosopher whose contributions to philosophy spans across existentialism, phenomenology and hermeneutics. He originally trained to be a Jesuit but he switched in 1911 to study mathematics and philosophy. He was born in Messkirch in the Black Forest region in September 26, 1889 and died in May 26, 1976. He was married to Elfride Petri in 1917 and had two sons with her. Although they never separated, he had an affair with Hannah Arendt, who was his student at Marburg in the 1920s.

He was influenced by the works of Franz Brentano and Aristotle. “Aristotle’s demand in the *Metaphysics* to know what it is that unites all possible modes of Being (or ‘is-ness’) is, in many ways, the question that ignites and drives Heidegger’s philosophy” (Wheeler 2020). He also engaged deeply the works of Kant, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Dilthey and Husserl.

Heidegger joined the Nazi Party in 1933 and was appointed the Rector of Freiburg University. Here, he implemented the policy of the Nazi Party by trying to conform university education to Hitler’s political programme. He resigned as Rector of the University in 1934 and became distanced from Nazi politics, but he never renounced his membership of the Nazi Party. After the war, Freiburg University investigated Heidegger and banned him from teaching, until 1949, when he regained the right to teach again.

He worked with Edmund Husserl in Freiburg University. His major work which turned out to be very influential is *Being and Time* (1927). His philosophical project focussed on the human being’s existence in their world as an individual within their social context. He considered being and the world inseparable.

He thinks that the reality of the human being which he describes as *Dasein* is often lost in inauthenticity of everyday life and that for the human being to regain or find authenticity, he must open the mystery of the Being, which for him, is the source of all things. His philosophy was anti-Cartesianism because he embraced an uncompromising holism that rejects any form of dualism like we find in Descartes’ philosophy. He rejects the distinction between mind and body, and the subject and object.

3.2 Heidegger’s Existentialism

Heidegger was a central figure in the formulation and propagation of existentialism. He did not develop a set of ideas or a system of philosophy, neither can it be said that he produced anything in the way of a neat structure of academic ideas, he was not so much interested in objects of scholarship. According to Samuel Stumpf, “with one bold stroke, he (Heidegger) shifted the attention of twentieth-century continental philosophy away from traditional concerns about theories and books and focused instead upon the concerns of thinking individual” (1989:496).

According to Heidegger, an individual is born in the world and responds to all his experiences by thinking. Thus, he sets out to explore the deepest nature of an individual’s thinking when he is thinking as an existing human being.

Having being introduced to philosophy at the young age of seventeen through the reading of Franz Brentano's *On the Manifold Meaning of Being according to Aristotle*, he took on the lifelong endeavour to search for the meaning of being, which for him, is the meaning that reigns in everything that is. He was also influenced by Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, and Nietzsche. His book, *Being and Time*, published in 1927, was regarded as the fundamental source of modern existentialism. It was a very influential book.

Heidegger was primarily concerned with clarifying our understanding of our own being; he tried to explain the meaning of being itself. He "transformed the concept of being from a highly abstract and remote concept into a subject of intense concern to every human being" (Stumpf 1989:497). In doing this, he evolved a new vocabulary and gave new meanings to old words in order to pass across his philosophical thought. He had a fresh interpretation of the concept of being and evolved a new conception and understanding of man.

Heidegger rejected the dualistic division between the subject and object in Cartesian philosophy and the notion that there is an external world. He avers that instead of philosophy to focus on these dualisms that characterise the history of philosophy, it should rather focus on "What is Being?" The question "What is Being?" would direct our attention to it means for something to 'be' before we can begin to examine the properties that objects are made up of. According to him the question, what is being? arises from the most basic philosophical puzzles, like; why is there something instead of nothing? What is being? generally narrows down what type of being one is. Thus, he centres his inquiry on this question.

His primary concern was to clarify our understanding of our own being. He tried to explain the meaning of being itself. He transformed the concept from its highly abstract connotation that makes it remote from us into a subject of intense concern to every human being. thus, he evolved a new vocabulary and gave new meanings to old words in order to pass across his philosophical thought. In other words, he had a fresh interpretation of the concept of being and evolved a new conception and understanding of man.

Heidegger sought to correct the error of thinking about man in the same way we think about things. He argued that there is a fundamental difference between man and things. Only man, for him, can raise the question about his being or about being itself, things cannot do that. Generally, we think about things by defining them; defining them consists in listing their attributes and characteristics. He argued that the essence of man cannot be accounted for in this way. This is because the being of man includes his awareness of his being, which is not the same with the being of things.

According to Heidegger, the word ‘man’ can be deceptive because the history of philosophy has defined man the way things are defined. For instance, Descartes thinks of man as mind and body placing emphasis on man as a combination of two substances – mind and body. This understanding of man sets him off as a knowing subject that faces a world as a known or knowable object (Agidigbi 2006:38-39). Heidegger avers that this is a distortion of the view of man and the world. Against this view, he seeks to avoid a definition of man in terms of properties or attributes that will divide man from the world. To achieve his aim, he coined a new word—*Dasein* which he argues more accurately describes the experience of human existence.

Dasein is a German word which literally means ‘being there’ and as used technically by Heidegger, it means ‘human existence.’ Man as *Dasein* is a continuous being who thinks about the meaning of everything that is. He is not seeking any particular result in his thought, he just thinks because he is a thinking or musing being. *Dasein* “connotes that man is a being who is present to the world but whose presence is not just like that of a spatial object like the stone or hammer with a fixed nature but in the sense of a meaning-making-being-in-the-world” (Agidigbi 2006:39). Therefore, for Heidegger, the essence of man is not in attributes or properties but in how he exists. *Dasein* expresses a mode of understanding; it is like saying ‘she is *in* love’, which does not refer to the location of the ‘she’ but her mode of being, in the same way, man as ‘*dasein*’, that is, ‘man as being-in-the-world’ is a description of the structure of his existence. This structure of his existence makes it possible for him to think meaningfully about the world (Stumpf 1989:498).

The term *Dasein* conveys a dynamic view of personality against the fixed nature or essence that the traditional conception of man has ascribed to man. “*Dasein* is not an object with properties, but is rather the ‘happening’ of a life course ‘stretched out between birth and death’” (Guignon 1999:371). Man as being is a possibility to become what he is not yet. So, man can be described as a being who is ‘not yet what he is’ and who is more than he actually is at any given moment. This implies that man is not a finished product but a product in the process of being made. Man is therefore, essentially a free being who decides for himself his mode of being. *Dasein* is a temporality that is concretised through the individual’s involvements in the world; it is the unitary phenomenon of being-in-the-world (Guignon 1999:371).

Man is being-in-the-world; therefore, he is inseparable with the world of things and people. He is however, essentially different from the things around him in the world. He knows the things around him in terms of their utility to him in his pursuit of his concerns. The world

is an instrumental world for man because by nature man is a social being, he is being-with-others; he cannot live or be conceived in isolation.

In the first part of his very influential work; *Being and Time*, Heidegger made an analysis of human existential traits. Here he discussed the existence of *Dasein* in three fundamental parts. According to him, man is characterised by three basic features; namely: (i) Facticity, (ii) Existentiality, and (iii) Fallenness.

Facticity reveals the limitations of man. These limitations consist in the fact that man is thrown into a world without his consent, which means that he is not responsible for his being-in-the-world. He just finds himself in existence and in circumstances that are not his own making. However, even though he is not responsible for his being-in-the-world and the circumstances surrounding his existence, he must freely put or install order in the world.

Existentiality describes man's possibility. This is the possibility of making himself what he wants to be. It includes also the possibility of changing the world by projecting himself into the future and committing himself to live in view of his self-project.

Fallenness describes man's tendency to alienate himself from his true or authentic self and thereby live an inauthentic life. As the world is the instrument for the formation of man, it is also the instrument for his alienation or fallenness; it can be responsible for his despair and sense of loss. This happens when man forgets his being and replaces it with beings, that is, the crowd; he becomes lost in the world.

These three ontological features of man represent his present, past and future. Facticity refers to his past, fallenness refers to his present, and existentiality refers to his future. These are the three basic dimensions of time. This immediately brings out the fact that for Heidegger, to be authentic or live the authentic life, man must be conscious of the temporal nature of his existence. He must be aware and conscious of his possibilities in the past which is repeatable, his possibilities in the future which he anticipates and shapes by his free choices and decisions in the present. The present is therefore, his moment of decision and vision. When man sees and appreciates himself in these three-tier temporal dimensions, he attains integrity and authenticity.

4.0 Conclusion

Heidegger's lifelong philosophical project was to answer the question of being—what is the meaning of being? For him, before we begin to ascribe properties to what is as objects, we need first to know what the thing. His response to the question about the meaning of

being is contained in his analysis of *Dasein*. *Dasein* is translated as ‘being there’ which expresses the human being’s mode of being. Heidegger used it to describe human existence which for him, is expressed in three fundamental aspects or parts; namely: facticity, existentiality and fallenness.

5.0 Summary

- Martin Heidegger had an interesting academic and politic life a lecturer at Freiburg University and a member of the Nazi Party.
- He criticised Cartesian dualism and embraced a philosophical holism.
- *Dasein* as human existence is at the centre of his existentialism.

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

- Briefly sketch the life of Martin Heidegger.
- What does Heidegger mean by *Dasein*?
- Identify and briefly comment on the existential themes in Heidegger’s philosophy.

7.0 References/Further Reading

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Unit 4: Jean Paul Sartre

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1.0 Introduction

In this unit, you shall be introduced to the person and existentialist thoughts of Jean Paul Sartre. Sartre was an atheist French novelist, playwright and philosopher. He is popular for his works: *Being and Nothingness* (1943) and *Existentialism and Humanism* (1946). He was also well known for his open relationship with Simone de Beauvoir, a French feminist and existentialist. His primary idea was that the human being is condemned to be free as a result of the contingency of human existence. He maintained the existentialist concepts of authenticity and individuality which for him, have to be earned and not learned.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes

At the end of this unit, the student will be familiar with the following:

1. The person of Jean Paul Sartre
2. The existentialist thoughts of Sartre

3.0 Main Contents

3.1 Introduction to Jean Paul Sartre

We can say that Jean Paul Sartre is one, if not, the best known philosopher of the 20th century. He was born June 21, 1905 and died April 15, 1980. His philosophical career spans through existentialism and phenomenology and his works have influence other fields of inquiry like: sociology and literary studies. In 1964, he won the Noble Prize for Literature, even though he attempted to decline the prize.

Sartre was the only child of his parents; the father was a French Navy officer. At the age of two he lost the father. He was raised by his mother and maternal grandfather – Charles Schweitzer, who taught him mathematics and introduced him to classical literature very early in life. At the age of twelve his mother remarried and he suffered bullying from his new family.

He was attracted to philosophy in his teenage days through contact with the works of Henri Bergson – *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*. He had certificates in psychology, history of philosophy, logic, general philosophy, ethics and sociology, and physics. He attended the weekly seminars of Alexandre Kojève, a Russian-born French philosopher and statesman. This had a decisive influence on Sartre's philosophical development.

He had a lifelong open relationship with Simone de Beauvoir, whom he met in 1929 at École Normale Supérieure (ENS), a selective and prestigious graduate school in Paris. After failing the aggregation—a competitive examination for civil service in French public education system, he tied for the first place with de Beauvoir at the next trial; although, he was eventually awarded the first place and de Beauvoir the second place.

Sartre was drafted into the French army in 1939 where he served as a meteorologist during World War II. He was captured by the German troops in 1940 and was a prisoner of war for nine months. While in confinement, he read Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* which influenced him in a major way as he wrote his *Phenomenological Ontology*. He was released from confinement because of his poor health in April 1941, although some account about his life claim that he escaped when he went on a visit to the ophthalmologist. After gaining civilian status, he regained his teaching position at Lycée Pasteur which is close to Paris. He returned to Paris in May 1941 and became a co-founder of 'Socialism and Liberty' with de Beauvoir, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Toussaint Desanti, Dominique Desanti, Jean Kanap and ENS students. He had a flourishing career in writing until his health deteriorated due to his pace of work. He had hypertension and became almost completely blind. The health condition is worsened by the fact that he was a chain smoker. He died April 15, 1980 in Paris from oedema—fluid retention, of the lung.

Following the central theme of existentialism that 'existence precedes essence' Sartre insists that man exists first without a purpose and finding himself in the world, based on his experiences, he defines the meaning of his life. He flips Aristotle's claim that man is created to fulfil some purpose or goal and that fulfilment in life comes from striving towards that goal, Sartre claims that there is no designed goal to give man a purpose

because there is no God who designs such purpose or goal. Therefore, the individual is left by himself to choose what life he thinks is best (Stokes 2012:279).

He argues that man is condemned to freedom, he is faced with a choice every time. Even when we think one is compelled, the point is that one still has a choice whether or not to give in to the compulsion. Therefore, we are always responsible for everything we do. Sartre made existentialism popular to the extent that existentialism was almost synonymous with his philosophy.

3.2 Sartre's Existentialism

Sartre's version of existentialism is a mix of three modes of thought that are associated with Karl Marx, Husserl, and Heidegger. Common to these three modes of thought is the concern about man's active role in moulding his own destiny. Marx had argued that philosophers have understood the world but the important point is to change it. Husserl argued that philosophy should seek its foundation in man; in the essence of man's concrete existence, and Heidegger had argued that our basic understanding of being is best achieved through the existential analysis of man. Sartre formulated his existential thought in his *Being and Nothingness* (1956) around the mix of these thoughts.

Prominent among Sartre's existential system of thought are the following principles: (i) existence precedes essence, and (ii) human freedom. His thought system betrays his atheism.

For Sartre, human nature cannot be defined in advance because it is not completely thought out in advance. Man exists first of all before his essence is evolved as he confronts himself, he emerges in the world and then defines himself afterwards. He argued that if man were an artefact his essence would have come before his existence and therefore, determines his nature. Unfortunately, man is not an artefact, he was created without a purpose; no fixed nature. His nature is determined by his own choice; the way he exists and acts express his essence. That is, what we mean by man is that his essence is in his existence.

The implication of Sartre's argument is that man has a greater dignity than stone or other beings. This greater dignity is a result of the fact that he consciously moves himself towards a future. In his contrast of man with other beings, he talks of two modes of being; being-in-itself and being-for-itself. Being-in-itself is the mode in which you find other beings, while man as a conscious subject exists as being-for-itself.

The consequence of existence preceding essence is not only expressed by the fact that man creates himself, but also lies in the fact man is responsible for his own existence as an individual. Other beings, like a stone, for instance, cannot take such responsibility for itself. And if it is the case that man's essential nature is already fixed, he cannot take responsibility for what he is.

Concerning human freedom, Sartre conceives of human freedom in terms of negation, annihilation and nothingness. Freedom for him is the capacity for negation and nihilation, which characterises the being-for-itself. Freedom is built on the foundation of nothingness and negation provides the grounds for the possibility of questions. This implies that we can only ask questions because of the possibility of negation. The same possibility of negation makes imagination, especially that of a situation different from the existing one possible. In the opinion of Sartre, since man can ask questions, it means he is not subject to the universal causal order, for to be able to question something implies the ability to negate the thing.

The power to negate is identical with freedom and it is rooted in the nothingness within man. This nothingness which man carries within himself is the foundation of his freedom. It is this same nothingness that makes man the kind of being that he is, namely, a being without support, a being impossible to identify with anything in a fixed or permanent way, a being that is not what he is and is what he is not. By implication therefore, freedom is not just a quality of man, but man is freedom, for freedom is identical with his being.

The freedom of man goes with a heavy and inescapable responsibility. As well as with a disturbing anguish. Man may not be responsible for a situation beyond his control that he finds himself; he is nonetheless responsible for the way he reacts to that situation. Freedom and responsibility go together; to be free is to be responsible. Along with freedom too is the inevitability of choice since to be free is to be compelled to choose. A free being cannot but choose; refusal to choose is actually a choice not to choose.

Sartre argues that man's awareness of the nature of his freedom and the responsibility that goes with the freedom grips him with anguish. He thus, realises the full implications of his freedom in his anguish. Man, on realisation of the anguish and immense responsibility of his freedom, attempts to escape from the same freedom. In his attempt to escape, he enters into self-deception. This is "bad faith." This bad faith or self-deception according to Sartre is expressed in different forms. Namely:

- (i) **Belief in determinism:** This is a denial of human freedom which some people take to because of the fear of the reality of human freedom; they invent a theory of

determinism. They start talking about human nature as the way in which they have been made by God and attribute what they do to human nature. Belief in human nature is a form of determinism (See Omoregbe 1991:97).

- (ii) **Spirit of Seriousness:** This is another attitude of self-deception according to Sartre which says that absolute values, rights and wrongs, are inscribed in nature and given to man *a priori*. In the view of Sartre, those who uphold this are cowards who think they have been freed from the anguish and responsibility of making personal choices and decisions.
- (iii) **Conformity to Social Moulds:** This is the attitude of keeping to certain behavioural pattern so as to conform to social moulds. It is an impersonal way of life which Heidegger refers to as the “inauthentic life” and Sartre calls “bad faith.”
- (iv) **Avoiding or Postponing Decisions:** This attitude plays itself out when in the face of serious situations that demands immediate decisions we postpone or avoid making decisions because we are afraid or uncomfortable with the unpleasant consequences of our decision. We pretend that things are not what we think they are. According to Sartre, it is self-deception. We live under the illusion that by postponing the decision, we have avoided making a decision, but the fact is postponing the decision is itself a decision that we have already made.

A striking aspect of Sartre’s existentialism is his atheism. He argues that man is created without essence or nature and thrown out there in the world without purpose. Therefore, he has to work out his essence and create a purpose for himself. Sartre’s atheism supports his argument for the notion that ‘existence precedes essence.’ Sartre’s novel, *Nausea* (1937) was in some ways a manifesto of atheistic existentialism. In the novel he deals with the dejected researcher; Anthoine Roquentin who became conscious of the fact that nature and every inanimate object are indifferent towards him and his tormented existence. They are extraneous to any human meaning and no human can see anything significant in them. His lecture “Existentialism and Humanism” which is sometimes referred to as “Existentialism is Humanism” outlines the fact that man makes himself and therefore, rules out the role of God in human existence and all such things he referred to as “deterministic excuses.”

4.0 Conclusion

Sartre had a life full of events that includes been raised by the mother alone with the aid of his maternal grandfather, having lost his own father at the age of two; being a prisoner of war, afflicted with sickness that eventually led to his death. Nonetheless, he had an accomplished life in academics and even won the Noble Prize for Literature. His

existentialist ideas are fleshed out in the themes of ‘existence precedes essence’ and ‘human freedom.’

5.0 Summary

- Sartre had an accomplished academic career.
- Central to Sartre’s existentialist thoughts are the notions of ‘existence precedes essence’ and ‘human freedom.’
- Sartre is an atheistic existentialist.

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

- Briefly itemise the significant points in Sartre’s life.
- Explain what Sartre means when he claims that the human being is condemned to freedom.
- What is the relationship between Sartre’s atheism and the existentialist claim that ‘existence precedes essence?’

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Unit 5: Martin Buber

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1.0 Introduction

Although Martin Buber rejected the label of being an existentialist philosopher, he is often characterised as one of them. His philosophy is described as the philosophy of dialogue which is a form of existentialism. It is centred on the distinction between the I-Thou relationship and the I-It relationship. He emphasised dialogical existence in which he considered existence as an encounter. In this unit, we shall explain Buber's notion of dialogue and existence using his categories of the I-Thou and I-It relationships. This unit shall also familiarise you with his person.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes

At the end of this unit, the student will be familiar with the following:

1. The person of Martin Buber
2. The existentialist thoughts of Buber

3.0 Main Contents

3.1 Introduction to Martin Buber

Martin Buber was an Austrian Jewish and Israeli philosopher born in Vienna to an Orthodox Jewish family on February 8, 1878. His parents divorced while he was three years old and was raised by his grandfather. He returned to his father's house in Lemberg at the age of fourteen in 1892. He had a personal religious crisis that made him break away with Jewish religious customs. He read Kant's, Kierkegaard's and Nietzsche's works and

was inspired to study philosophy in Vienna. He married Paula Winkler who was a brilliant Catholic writer. She however, left the Catholic Church to practice Judaism.

He studied in the universities of Vienna, Berlin, Leipzig and Zürich. He studied philosophy and art. His doctoral dissertation was about the theories of individuation in the thoughts of Nicholas of Cusa and Jakob Böhme who were two great mystics. Nietzsche's nihilism and criticism of modern culture had the greatest influence on Buber in his university days. This eventually reflected in his involvement with Zionism – a Jewish nationalist movement whose goal was the creation and support of a Jewish national state in Palestine.

Buber was a prolific author, scholar, literary translator and political activist. His writings in German and Hebrew covered topics in Jewish mysticism, social philosophy, biblical studies, religious phenomenology, philosophical anthropology, education, politics and art. His manifold activities were inspired by his philosophy of encounter—man's meeting with other beings. His most famous work is *I and Thou* (1923). In this short book, he discussed our relationship with others as a two-fold type of relationship; the I-It and I-Thou relationships. While the I-It relationship is between subjects and objects of thought and action, the I-Thou relationship is an encounter between subjects.

Buber never accepted being called a philosopher or theologian, he regarded himself as a philosophical anthropologist. He insisted that he was not interested in ideas, but in personal experience. He also refused to discuss God as a subject, rather he would discuss our relationships with God. God, was for him the great or eternal Thou who enables the human I-Thou relations between man and other beings. The mutuality between man and other beings in the I-Thou relations is dependent on the levels of being. In the I-Thou relationship the two parties encounter each other in the fullness of their being

3.2 Buber's Existentialism

In his best known work; *I and Thou*, Buber insists that we need to get over the temptation to reduce human relations to the simple either/or which presents a rational or romantic ways of relating to one another. According to him, by the very nature of our being, we enter into dialogic relations with both other humans and animate beings like animals, trees, and even the Divine Thou—God (Zank and Braitermna 2020:4).

For Buber, the relationship between persons, animate objects and deity are reducible to three expressive signifiers: "I", "You" and "It". These three constitute the elemental variables that structure all our experiences as relation through their combination and re-combination. These three elements which are individuated realise themselves when they

enter into a relationship with each other. In a relationship, they burst into life, they grow, they vanish and they revive. According to Buber, isolated “I” does not exist, apart from existing in a relationship to another. This relationship is what he calls ‘dialogue’ or ‘encounter.’

In his thesis of dialogical existence, Buber uses the I-Thou and I-It to categorise modes of consciousness, interaction and being through which individuals engage with one another and inanimate objects and all reality in general. These word pairs (I-Thou and I-It) philosophically denote complex ideas about the human being’s modes of being, especially how the individual exists and actualises his existence. According to Buber, the individual is always engaged in the world in one of these modes.

The I-Thou or I-You as it is also referred to, stresses the mutual, holistic existence of two beings. Since these beings meet one another in their authentic existence, the I-Thou relationship is a concrete encounter. Buber uses a variety of examples in daily life to illustrate the I-Thou relationship; for example, the relationship between two lovers, the relationship between an observer and a pet animal, the relationship between an author and a tree or even between two strangers in a bus. Thus, we can describe the I-Thou relationship with the words: encounter, meeting, dialogue, mutuality and exchange.

One of the I-Thou relationships that is key to Buber is the one between a human being and God. It is a relationship that enables the human being to interact with God. For Buber, every I-Thou relationship with anything or anyone connects with the eternal relation to God. It takes the openness of the individual to the idea of such a relationship for him to create the I-Thou relationship with God. Openness to the idea of the relationship does not mean the individual should actively pursue it as that would create qualities that are associated with It-ness and thereby, prevent an I-Thou relation because the qualities of It-ness would limit the relationship to I-It relationship. If the individual is open to the I-Thou relationship God will come to the individual and the relationship would last for as long as the individual is willing and open to it.

The I-Thou relation signifies a pure encounter “one whole unique entity with another in such a way that the other is known without being subsumed under a universal” (Scott 2021:2b). This is because the “Thou” in the I-Thou relationship cannot be reduced to spatial or temporal characteristics. As Buber explains “The formation of the ‘I’ of the ‘I-Thou’ relation takes place in a dialogical relationship in which each partner is both active and passive and each is affirmed as a whole being. Only in this relationship is the other truly an ‘other’, and only in this encounter can the ‘I’ develop as a whole being” (Scott 2021:2b).

For Buber, there are spheres of dialogue or the I-Thou relations that correspond to three types of otherness. These are:

- i. The exchange of language with man.
- ii. The transmission below language with nature.
- iii. The reception above language with spirit.

The exchange of language that characterise the dialogue with man is obvious but the dialogue with nature and spirit are not as obvious; they constitute the most controversial aspect of the I-Thou relations. Given that the I-Thou relationship is a meeting of singularities, if we truly enter into a relation with a thing, for example, a pet animal, we get to know it as a singular being and not just a s thing with certain attributes that presents itself to be analysed or dissected. In this way, the relation will be that of one whole (the 'I' - myself) confronting another whole (the 'Thou' – pet animal). The dialogue with spirit is not as easy to explicate because Buber employs different images to denote spirit; for instance, 'eternal Thou' which refers to God, and 'form' which refers to moments of artistic inspiration or intensive engagement with the works of other thinkers.

The I-It relationship is almost the opposite of the I-Thou relationship (Kramer and Gawlick 2003:39). Unlike the encounter of one another between two beings in the I-Thou relationship, the beings in the I-It relationship do not actually meet. What happens is that the "I" in the I-It relationship confronts and qualifies an idea of the being and then treats the being as an object. Such objects are considered as mere mental representations that have been created and sustained by and in the individual mind. given the nature of the I-It relationship, we can describe as a relationship with oneself because there is no dialogue involved in it; what we have is a monologue. According to Buber, "monologue is not just a turning away from the other but also turning back on oneself" (Scott 2021:2b). In a monologue relationship, the individual considers and treats the other – things and people, as objects to be used, instead of, to be experienced. In other words, the other is perceived as an 'It' which implies that the other is classified as an object which is predictable and manipulable and therefore, only exists as part of one's experiences.

For Buber, the human life is an oscillation between I-Thou and I-It. The I-Thou experience are few and far between. In his view, the evils of isolation and dehumanisation that characterise modernity is a result of the purely analytic and material view of existence which is the offshoot of expanding and extending the I-It relations to human beings. When the paradigm of relationship between human beings become the I-It relationship instead of the dialogue and encounter of the I-thou relationship, existents and the meaning of existence are devalued.

Buber avers that even though man presents himself to the world in the I-Thou and I-It modes of being, they do not exhaust the inner life of the individual. Although, we are born as an individual, the development of our individuality that shapes our personality as different individuals is an ongoing achievement that we must constantly maintain. The self is more fragmented or unified through its relationships to others in the I-Thou relations.

The differences between the I-Thou and I-It relationships include:

- i. While the “Thou” in the I-Thou relationship is not reducible to spatial temporal characteristics, the I-It relationship is driven by categories like ‘same’ and ‘difference’ with a focus on universal definitions.
- ii. While the I-Thou relationship is dialogical, the I-It relationship is a monological.
- iii. The ‘I’ of the I-Thou relationship is a whole, focused, single individual. But the ‘I’ of the I-It relationship is a self-enclosed, solitary individual.

4.0 Conclusion

Sartre had a life full of events that includes been raised by the mother alone with the aid of his maternal grandfather, having lost his own father at the age of two; being a prisoner of war, afflicted with sickness that eventually led to his death. Nonetheless, he had an accomplished life in academics and even won the Noble Prize for Literature. His existentialist ideas are fleshed out in the themes of ‘existence precedes essence’ and ‘human freedom.’

5.0 Summary

- Sartre had an accomplished academic career.
- Central to Sartre’s existentialist thoughts are the notions of ‘existence precedes essence’ and ‘human freedom.’
- Sartre is an atheistic existentialist.

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

- Briefly itemise the significant points in Sartre’s life.
- Explain what Sartre means when he claims that the human being is condemned to freedom.
- What is the relationship between Sartre’s atheism and the existentialist claim that ‘existence precedes essence?’

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Module 4: Understanding Phenomenology

- Unit 1: Edmund Husserl and the Method of Phenomenology
- Unit 2: The Phenomenological Method
- Unit 3: *Epoche* as a Key Theme in Phenomenology
- Unit 4: Intentionality as a Key Theme in Phenomenology

Unit 1: Edmund Husserl and the Method of Phenomenology

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1.0 Introduction

Even though the term ‘phenomenology’ precede Edmund Husserl, he was the one that developed the basic claims of phenomenology into a philosophical method before the first World War. Husserl was a mathematician who later became a philosopher. As a philosopher his concern was to find what he called the ‘Archimedean point’ of philosophy. By this he meant the foundation for knowledge. He argued that if we detach ourselves from the views and beliefs that we previously hold (bracketing them), and approach our object of knowledge without biases, prejudices and predilections, we will be able to understand the essence of things as we experience them. his fundamental aim was to discern the essential nature of mental acts and thereby arrive at the truths that constitute the sources of human knowledge. In this unit, you shall learn about how Husserl intend to achieve this aim and the postulations he provided towards arriving at genuine and indubitable knowledge.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes

At the end of this unit, the student will be familiar with the following:

1. The motivation behind Husserl's phenomenological views.
2. Husserl's idea of phenomenology
3. The notions of descriptive and transcendental phenomenology

3.0 Main Contents

3.1 Background to Husserlian Phenomenology

The evolution of the phenomenological method is against the backdrop of scepticism; the need to eliminate scepticism and creating an indubitable foundation for knowledge. The threat of scepticism always prompted the need to firmly establish the foundations of knowledge in modern Western philosophy, especially after the scepticism of the 16th century attacked virtually everything, undermining and nearly crumbling all the efforts in academics, politics, religion, and the spiritual unity of Europe. Scepticism questioned the certainty of both science and faith (Oyeshile 2006:41). From René Descartes to Franz Brentano, philosophers made conceited efforts to provide unshakable ground for human knowledge.

Husserl begins his philosophy from the natural standpoint of our everyday world as we experience it. He adopted the method that is we now call 'phenomenological reduction' in which we "ignore all previously held personal, philosophical, and even scientific assumptions associated with a thing and then examine what remains" (Weate 1998:60). The idea of this reduction is to unravel how the mind works. Husserl believed that this reduction can be retro-activated on consciousness itself in order to attain apodictic certainty; knowledge beyond the disputation of scepticism.

Husserl owes his interest and development of the phenomenological method to Franz Brentano's interest in the concept of 'intentionality' and the descriptive investigation of inner perceptions (Farber 1943:8). According to Husserl, he got to understand through Brentano's psychological theory of the mind that philosophy could be a rigorous science. Brentano's psychological theory of the mind which was developed under the Aristotelian, Scholastic and Cartesian influences, was itself centred on the concept of intentionality. The theory argues that "the mind is differentiated from physical reality by its ability to intend or refer to something beyond itself" (Fuller 1966:550).

According to Husserl, philosophy had abandoned the task of becoming a strict science which means that it has lost its sense of direction. Philosophy should be a rigorous science

that investigates the most radical, fundamental, primitive, original evidences of conscious experience. In other words, philosophy should go beneath the constructions of science and common-sense and investigate the foundations of these constructions in experience. Hence, J. M. Edie says: “It [philosophy] studies what all the particular sciences take for granted and what we in ‘natural’ everyday experience takes for granted. A ‘presuppositionless’ philosophy is one which will reach what is absolutely primary or most fundamental in experience” (1962:18-19).

According to Husserl, after Plato and Aristotle, subsequent philosophers neglected the rigorous aspect of philosophy which led philosophy to a chaotic situation. The chaotic situation Husserl refers to here is the tendency to view philosophy through the mirror of the natural sciences because of the successes that the natural sciences have recorded. According to Husserl, this tendency which he described as ‘naturalistic objectivism’ is the triumph of naturalism at the collapse of rationalism. For Husserl, philosophy will regain its lost status if it becomes phenomenological.

3.2 Husserl and the Method of Phenomenology

In an attempt to deconstruct modern Western philosophy, Husserl argued in his *Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man* (1936) that Western culture lost its true direction and purpose when philosophy departed from its original goal. The original goal of philosophy was “to provide answers for the human and humane concerns of humanity by dealing vigorously with the human quest for the highest values, which consist in developing the unique broad range capacities of human reason” (Oyeshile 2006:47). Since in his opinion, rationalism has collapsed, Husserl set himself the task of saving human reason. That which human reason is to be saved from provides the background for his phenomenology. He therefore, attempts to develop a proper method through which we can grasp the essential nature of things in order to overcome the naturalistic objectivism of the natural sciences that is eroding rationalism. His attempt led to the formulation of the two parts of his phenomenology, namely, (i) descriptive phenomenology and (ii) transcendental phenomenology.

3.2.1 Descriptive Phenomenology

This aspect of Husserl’s phenomenological method reflects the great influence of Brentano on him. It concerns itself with the descriptive analysis of human experience just as it occurs. Meaning that it leaves out from this analysis any prejudices and prior assumptions or presuppositions. This is aimed at achieving an objective, unbiased knowledge. Phenomenology at this stage is not concerned with the existential aspects of things. It is

rather interested in the essence of things. For Husserl, we arrive at the essence of things through his method of *epoche*, which is the same as ‘eidetic reduction’ or ‘science of essences.’

The method of *epoche* consists in bracketing the existential aspects of things so as to intuit their essences. It is a detachment from any form of biases, emotions, prejudices, presuppositions, and preconceptions so as to contemplate the essence of phenomena.

Phenomenology, for Husserl, is a 20th century Cartesianism. Therefore, he credits Descartes as the genuine patriarch of phenomenology because it was Descartes who prompted his quest for the foundation of knowledge starting from the same point as Descartes, namely, the thinking self (Stumpf 1989:488). It means therefore, that the Cartesian radical doubt is the predecessor of the phenomenological method.

Although Husserl and Descartes share the same starting point, there were basic differences in their methods. While Descartes sought to arrive at certain knowledge through systematic doubt, Husserl avers that we must decide to disregard all our present knowledge including the presuppositions that we must arrive at an absolute foundation of knowledge as was the case in the systematic doubt of Descartes. Thus, Husserl takes a more radical approach than Descartes did. He chooses to look at things and facts themselves as they are given in actual experience and intuition; he judges only by evidence. According to Stumpf, “Husserl simply withheld any judgment about experiences, seeking instead to describe his experiences as fully as possible in terms of the evidence of experience itself” (1989:488).

For both Descartes and Husserl, experience revolves around the self (the ego), and the ego is the source of all knowledge. While for Descartes, the ego is the first axiom in a logical sequence that eventually leads him to knowledge of reality, Husserl sees the ego as simply the matrix of experience and therefore, puts the primary emphasis on experience rather than logic. His primary concern is to discover and describe that which is given in experience, just as it presented in its pure form.

Husserl criticised Descartes for going beyond the ego to the notion of extended substance—body, which ties the subject to an objective reality and thereby produce the mind-body dualism. For Husserl, the actual facts of experience are more accurately described by pure subjectivity. Rather than the *ego cogito* (I think) of Descartes, Husserl argues that the *ego cogito cogitatum* (I think something) more accurately describes experience as it is the typical human experience. Oyeshile summarizes Husserl’s repudiation of Descartes thus:

The significance of Husserl's repudiation of Descartes is that there is always a link between consciousness and thinking which is identified in the object of thought and the element of intentionality that creates the phenomena of experience. Husserl's emphasis that there is an indissoluble intentionality is a direct influence of his teacher, Brentano, who insisted that all psychological acts – thinking, desiring, linking, loving, hating and so forth – are object-oriented (2006:49).

Note that Husserl not only disagreed with Descartes on the mind-body dualism, he also rejected the Kantian distinction between things as they are in themselves (noumenon) and things as they appear to us (phenomenon). He argues that the phenomenon is one and the same as the noumenon and only that which we see clearly and distinctly in internal experience is valid. Husserl rejected Kantian distinction because it implies that the essences of things do not appear to us and therefore, cannot be known. Whereas for Husserl, the objects of phenomenological knowledge are precisely the essences of things (Omoregbe 1990:16).

3.2.2 Transcendental Phenomenology

The purely descriptive phenomenology of Husserl gradually developed into transcendental idealism. According to Husserl, the ego discovers its true itself and it is in the being of the ego that the world consists. The argument is that, "as the ego increases its subjectivity, it becomes removed from the empirical realm and subsequently becomes a transcendental ego" (Omoregbe 1990:16). This is possible as a result of the double bracketing of the empirical world and the natural self of the subject. The bracketing of the natural self which Husserl describes as 'transcendental reduction' gives way to the transcendental self.

Transcendental reduction is a process by which the subject reduces his natural self as well as his psychological life to the transcendental and phenomenological experience. By psychological life, we mean the domain of our internal psychological experience. The objective world, in its past, present and future, is drawn from the self therefore, all the existential meaning and value of the objective world is drawn from the transcendental self. The point Husserl makes here is that the transcendental ego is no longer part of the empirical world and in fact, the transcendental ego is responsible for the creation of the world. At this point, the transcendental ego is above the world and it can look back at itself as an ego that was previously immersed in the world.

Husserlian phenomenology which spells out the basic teachings of the phenomenological method does not go without criticism. From the point of view of epistemology and ontology, Husserl underlines a very important idea, namely that the essences of phenomena

are very vital to the understanding of reality. We can credit Husserl for lucidly pointing out that it is possible and indeed desirable to get to the essence of things through appearance. In this regard, his descriptive phenomenology is of immense benefit.

The very important question however, is whether it is possible to have a bias-free, presuppositionless and preconceptionless knowledge? Such knowledge is impossible and unrealistic. To be bias-free is to strip ourselves of all our existential characteristics. As long as we exist, we exist as existential beings and cannot but be saddled with our existential characteristics or features. Husserl's advocacy for a bias-free understanding of the object is to guarantee objectivity. While we cannot downplay the value of objectivity, at the same time, we cannot devoid ourselves of our existential features as being in existence; for to be in existence (being) is to be necessarily vested with existential characteristics.

4.0 Conclusion

Although we can trace Husserl's notion of the phenomenological method to the influence on Franz Brentano, Husserl credits Descartes as setting the tone for the phenomenological method. Both the Husserlian and Cartesian method had the similar aim of providing unshakable foundation for human knowledge. However, the details of how this is to be achieved differ. Husserl does not agree with Descartes' dualism of mind and body, neither did he accept the Kantian distinction between the noumenon and the phenomenon. His analysis of the method of phenomenology saw him move from descriptive phenomenology to transcendental phenomenology.

5.0 Summary

- Husserl decries the collapse of rationalism and sets himself to regain the lost status of philosophy through the phenomenological method by saving human reason.
- The method of phenomenology is Husserl's attempt to combat and overcome the naturalistic objectivism of the natural sciences that is eroding rationalism.
- Husserl's method of phenomenology has two parts; the descriptive and transcendental parts.
- Even though Husserl's method of phenomenology shares the same goal with Cartesian systematic doubt, they differ substantially in how to achieve their common goal.

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

- Describe the similarity and differences between Husserlian method of phenomenology and Cartesian methodic doubt.
- What are the two aspects of Husserl's method of phenomenology?
- In what sense can we say Brentano influenced Husserl in his formulation of the method of phenomenology?

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Unit 2: The Phenomenological Method

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1.0 Introduction

The phenomenological method which is closely associated with Edmund Husserl aims to describe, understand and interpret what the experiences of human life means. Its focus is on research questions like: What is it like to experience a particular situation? Its primary objective therefore, is the direct investigation and description of phenomena as we consciously experience them. It tries to remove theories of causal explanation, preconceptions and presuppositions from our conscious experience in order to grasp its accurate meaning. The term; phenomenology itself is traceable to Johann H. Lambert use in the 18th century to distinguish between truth, illusion and error in his epistemology. And later it was used by Hegel to trace the development of the human spirit from mere sense experience to ‘absolute knowledge.’ Its present understand is however, found in the works of Husserl. This unit shall explain the basic features of the phenomenological method – the natural and phenomenological attitudes.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes

At the end of this unit, the student will be familiar with the following:

1. The basic features of the phenomenological method.
2. The two forms of attitudes that are connected to the phenomenological method.

3.0 Main Contents

3.1 The Phenomenological Method

The phenomenological method is a way of describing rather than a way of explaining. It stands in contradistinction to the scientific method. While the scientific method tries to go behind the data of experience to seek out the laws of nature that govern the behaviour of things and make them as they are, the phenomenological method tries to describe the elements within our environment as we experience them. The scientific method, in an attempt to explain the laws of nature, loses sight of the original data altogether. It does not acknowledge the human and existential reality of free decision making. It therefore, assumes that the important data are those that fit its already preconceived criteria of significance. The phenomenological method, on the contrary takes into consideration these existential factors and tries to understand phenomena from the descriptive perspective of our conscious experience.

To thoroughly understand the phenomenological method, we need to come to terms with two recurrent standpoints in Husserl's philosophy. These standpoints are the 'natural standpoint' and the 'phenomenological standpoint.' They are epistemological standpoints that confront any philosopher who seeks to attain understanding and meaning. They both correspond to the mode of operation employed by a natural attitude and a phenomenological attitude (Okeregebe 1996:246). We can only appreciate the phenomenological method when we transcend the natural attitude and employ the phenomenological attitude as the ontological foundation in evaluating knowledge. Therefore, the step one in understanding the phenomenological method is to understand the natural attitude.

3.1.1 The Natural Attitude

The natural attitude in the works of Husserl refers to the stage of pre-philosophical standpoint; this is the attitude of everyday life. It consists in the evaluation of experience according to the dictates of our superficial thinking. This is a thinking that is characterized and influenced by unexpected and uncontrollable happenings or changes of our everyday life; it is what epistemology will call naïve realism. It takes knowledge of the world and reality for granted. Husserl describes the natural attitude thus:

I am aware of a world, spread out in space endlessly and in time becoming and without end. I am aware of it, that means first of all, I discover it immediately, intuitively, I experience it. Through sight, touch, hearing, etc. in the different ways of sensory perception, corporeal things, somehow spatially distributed are for me simply there (1969:6).

This description of the natural attitude implies that out there, there is a real external world which exists in space and time and it is much the same for all humans in relation to our daily experiences of this world. It also implies a blind acceptance of what the senses present to us about this external world as valid knowledge. The natural attitude is contented with the epistemological role of the passive and uncritical observation of the world. This is why doubts, fears and anxieties besiege our understanding at the level of natural attitude, since it takes the veracity of the data presented by the senses about the world for granted.

3.1.2 The Phenomenological Attitude

The phenomenological attitude on the contrary is a transcendental stage which Husserl refers to as the arithmetical world. At this stage we reflect on the ideas given by nature; we are purged and purified of what is given in and by the natural attitude. Husserl refers to the sciences of the natural attitude as dogmatic because they take for granted that which is conventional, which at in-depth reflection become problematic, while those of the phenomenological attitude are critical. According to him;

On one side stand the sciences of the dogmatic standpoint, facing the facts misconceived about all problems of an epistemological or sceptical kind. They take their start from the primordial givenness of the facts they deal with and they ask what the nature of the immediately given facts may be, and what can be immediately infused from that natural ground concerning these same facts and those of the domain as a whole. On the other side we have the rigorous inquiries of the epistemological, the especially philosophical standpoint (1969:96).

The implication of Husserl's statement is that, to the level at which the sciences of the natural standpoint have developed in exact sciences; we find them clear and comprehensible. Therefore, we get the impression that we have gotten the truth of reality based on the reliable methods of objectivity. If, however, we decide to give a deeper and more reflective thought to what we have, we find errors and some confusion as we become entangled in patent difficulties and self-contradictions. We are faced with the danger of falling into scepticism (Husserl 1970: 17).

Kolawole Owolabi interprets the Husserlian distinction between the natural and phenomenological attitudes to mean that a genuine theory of knowledge cannot be grounded on the natural standpoint since that will impoverish the very essence of epistemology (1992:50-64). The very essence of epistemology is to critique theoretical reason. To do this, Husserl calls for the transcendence of the natural attitude to the

phenomenological attitude so as to give knowledge a genuine epistemological foundation. In simple terms, it implies that genuine philosophy begins at the phenomenological stage. Therefore, Husserl invites us to put aside the natural standpoint and hold onto the phenomenological standpoint.

The constant feature of Husserlian phenomenology is the idea of a rigorous science and this is why Husserl emphasises the eidetic science; the science aimed at discovering the essence of things. He had criticised the sciences of the natural order arguing that they needed readjustments to overcome their superfluity. In his opinion, the superfluity is based on:

- i. The degeneration of the sciences into an unphilosophical study of mere facts which has made science lost the significance for man's life as a whole.
- ii. Its naturalistic attitude which has rendered science incapable of coping with the problem of absolute truth and validity (see Okeregbe 1996:250).

To achieve the rigour of the phenomenological science, we have to be philosophically radical by turning to things or objects as the roots of the rigorous science. Further investigations, according to Husserl, shows that beyond things or objects lies something deeper in the consciousness of the knowing subject to whom the things or objects are manifested. This is what he referred to as 'transcendental subjectivity.' This implies that you first 'turn to the object' and then 'turn to the subject.' It is in these turns that misunderstandings about the phenomenological method arise. Turning to the subject according to Husserl, we have to radically scrutinise the object. This consists in a methodological suspension of the general thesis which makes up the natural attitude. This is where Husserl introduces his popular phenomenological *epoche*.

4.0 Conclusion

The phenomenological method refers to a way of describing phenomena different from explaining phenomena as the scientific method does. The phenomenological method describes the elements within our environment as we experience them. it requires that we understand two epistemological standpoints – natural and phenomenological standpoints, for us to thoroughly understand the phenomenological method. The natural standpoint which corresponds to the natural attitude is the ordinary, uncritical way we view things. This gives rise to the phenomenological standpoint which corresponds to the rigorous and critical attitude that characterise the phenomenological method.

5.0 Summary

- The phenomenological method is a way of describing rather than a way of explaining.
- There are two epistemological standpoints which according to Husserl would enable us understand the phenomenological method – natural and phenomenological standpoints.
- To achieve the rigor of the phenomenological science, we need to be philosophically radical; it requires that we turn our attention to objects as we experience them.

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

- Briefly analyse what you understand by the phenomenological method.
- Briefly analyse what you understand by the phenomenological attitude.
- Explain the natural attitude and its relationship to the phenomenological attitude as two standpoints of Husserlian phenomenological method.

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Unit 3: *Epoche* as a Key Theme in Phenomenology

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1.0 Introduction

Like every philosophical system, phenomenology has its key themes and concepts which encompass its teaching and beliefs. To understand the key themes of phenomenology will certainly help us to understand the phenomenological method. The key themes of phenomenology enable phenomenologists to realise their objective of phenomenology as a descriptive and rigorous science. In this unit, we shall discuss *epoche* as one of the main themes or concept in phenomenology. *Epoche* is a method of bracketing of our presuppositions in our understanding of objects. The idea is to grasp the object as it is, the way it presents itself to our experience. It is a method of reduction

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes

At the end of this unit, the student will be familiar with the following:

1. The meaning of *epoche*
2. The centrality of *epoche* in the phenomenological method
3. The various forms or types of reduction that *epoche* characterises

3.0 Main Contents

3.1 *Epoche*

This can also be referred to as the ‘method of reduction.’ The term *epoche* is the Greek term for bracketing or suspension of belief. Husserl uses it to describe his method of phenomenological suspension in which we detach ourselves from any viewpoints with regards to the objective world. It means the removal from our minds all, and any prejudices, prior beliefs, and assumptions concerning the object of investigation. This will enable us approach our investigation of the object with an open mind (Omoregbe 2001:24).

The idea of *epoche* or phenomenological bracketing was introduced to phenomenology by Husserl. He borrowed it from mathematics. As a mathematical method, it is employed in resolving interrelated or complex problems. It attends to complex problems in piece-meal manner without further complicating the problem. As employed by Husserl in phenomenology, it serves to put aside dubious and controversial cognition from the natural standpoint. *Epoche* is the act of focussing on any part or all of one’s experience by observing, analysing, abstracting and describing that experience and then removing oneself from the immediate and lived engagement in it. Thus, Owolabi describes it as “the process of sweeping off the prejudices of the natural standpoint in order to attain the phenomenological standpoint” (1992:286).

Husserl himself describes *epoche* thus:

The thesis undergoes a modification whilst remaining in itself what it is; we set it as it were “out of action.” We disconnect it,” “bracket it.” It still remains there like the bracketed in the bracket, like the disconnected outside the connexional system. The thesis is experienced as lived (*erlebnis*) but we make no use of it, and by that, of course, we do not indicate privation as when we say of the ignorant that he makes no use of certain thesis (1970:108).

Epoche extends to all phenomena and elements of experience, including people, things, beliefs, cultural situations, etc. To bracket all phenomena does not necessarily mean to put them off; it rather means that we look at them necessarily judging whether they are realities or appearances. We abstain from passing opinions or judgments, or valuations about them; it is standing back from things. It enables us to review the naivety that characterizes the natural attitude in the light of the phenomenological attitude. It helps us to destroy all interest so that we can rebuild our experience; it is the demolition exercise according to Jim Unah, which is motivated by the genuine desire to reconstruct. It gravitates us “towards the essential structures of experience or that we construct the world as it is when we suspend all judgments as we focus attention on the given fact of experience” (Unah 1996:217).

According to Husserl, *epoche* means that:

We put out of action the general thesis which belongs to the essence of the natural standpoint, we place in brackets whatever it includes respecting the nature of being: this entire natural world therefore which is continually 'there for us', 'present to our hand' and will ever remain there, is a fact about the world of which we continue to be conscious, even though it pleases us to put it in brackets. If I do this, as I am fully free to do, I do not then deny this world as though I were a sophist, I do not doubt that it is there as though I were a sceptic; but I use the phenomenological *epoche* which completely bars me from using any judgment that concerns spatio-temporal existence (1970:110-111).

Based on Husserl's description, *epoche* is a way of putting aside all unnecessary data of experience, this will enable the perceiver to analyse and interpret a particular process of experience. It is a process of perception that encourages us to fully concentrate on the particular object or phenomenon of perception. It suspends all previous ideas about a given phenomenon of cognition so as to concentrate on the immediate and direct data of the phenomenon. It is simply correct to say that bracketing is an epistemological tool used to get the epistemic subject ready to obtain a perfect and immediate knowledge of phenomenon (Owolabi 2001:287).

The Husserlian notion of *epoche* is not the same as the Cartesian methodic doubt. Husserl used the method of *epoche* to describe detachment from any point of view concerning the objective world. Descartes, on the other hand, used the methodic doubt to describe his refusal to believe and accept any proposition that he cannot perceive clearly and distinctly. Therefore, Descartes proceeded to doubt everything, all phenomena, including the world, except his thinking self. On the contrary, Husserl brackets all the elements of experience, refusing to assert that he would exist or not, he brackets the entire constitution of our experienced life; objects, other people, and cultural institutions. Husserlian bracketing simply means to abstain from asserting phenomena as real or appearance. In this *epoche*, Husserl discovered himself as the ego. By the ego, we mean the consciousness in which consists the objective world as it exists in its entirety. In contrast to this, is the fact that Descartes deduced the objective world from the residual certainty of the ego (Stumpf 1989:490).

Husserl's *epoche* is an epistemic method aimed at attaining immediate apodictic knowledge following the spirit of Descartes' methodic doubt. It is however, not to be confused with the Cartesian method. In *epoche*, the epistemic subject is not in doubt about his previous beliefs like in the Cartesian methodic doubt. The epistemic agent only puts

aside previous ideas and suppositions, for the moment, about the object of cognition, to allow him have a prejudice-free cognition. This is not the same as doubting all previously held beliefs about the object of cognition, either sincerely or pretentiously, as it is the case with Cartesian methodic doubt. It is a caution to the epistemic agent in his process of observation, not to becloud the phenomenon with his previously held beliefs, prejudices, suppositions and biases.

For Husserl, the world is simply all that we are aware of what appears valid to us in our actions of thought. Therefore, he argues that we should not assert anything about that which we do not see ourselves. By this very fact, he rejects the Cartesian and Kantian notions that reality goes beyond the immediate phenomenal realm. According to Husserl, *epoche* enables us to discover the original or primordial mode of experience. What we find here is consciousness and the objects of consciousness. The ego is the source of objects and what they mean because in the ego we always find the irreducible element of experience. It means therefore, that objects appear as they are determined by the structure of the ego or thinking self. That is to say that “the meaning and being of things is primordially constituted in and through consciousness” (Stumpf 1989:491). Husserl refers to this as the act of intentionality which is the defining characteristic of consciousness. The idea of intentionality will be explained further in the next unit.

Epoche serves as a starting point as it provides and guarantees the kind of neutrality required by the phenomenological method because it is epistemologically impartial. It is therefore, a necessary condition to all phenomenological procedures. It leads us back to the centre of reality which is the conscious self; it leads us into the method of reductions.

3.2 The Method of Reductions

The idea of reduction is special to the phenomenological method. It is a technical term used to describe the phenomenological devices that permits the cognitive agent to discover the experiential surge of the lifeworld. Reduction is aimed at re-achieving a direct and primal contact with the world just as we experience it. It is against the conceptualisation of the world – explaining the world in terms of concepts. Reduction is the view that we experience meaning when we bracket lived experience. It brings into focus the uniqueness of the particular phenomenon to which the cognitive agent is oriented.

Given that the project of phenomenology is understood in a variety of ways, there are many philosophical explications of the notion of reduction. Here we are concerned with the Husserlian notion. Husserl distinguishes three stages of reduction, which some scholars usual collapse into two. They are; (i) phenomenal reduction, (ii) eidetic reduction, and (iii)

transcendental reduction. Some scholars collapse the phenomenal reduction into the natural attitude since the phenomenological procedure begins with the second stage and they talk about only two stages of reduction.

3.2.1 Phenomenal Reduction

The phenomenal reduction is the stage through which we change all that is given in experience into a phenomenon. The phenomenon here is that which is known in and by consciousness through intuition, recollection, and judgment. Phenomenological reduction requires that we remove the theoretical or scientific conceptions and thematisations that overshadow the phenomenon we wish to study. These conceptions and thematisations blind us from the phenomenon. To remove theoretical conceptions does not mean we should ignore them, rather, it requires that we examine them to know how the theories veil or hide the experiential reality upon which they are based. Phenomenological reduction is oriented towards the beginning of phenomenon, to understand the phenomenon as we experience it.

3.2.2 Eidetic Reduction

The eidetic reduction which is the most central to the phenomenological method in the tradition of Husserl, consists in the movement from that which is given in experience to the essences of that which is given in experience. Here the inquirer asks: What makes this experience uniquely different from other related experiences? This question requires that we go beyond the past of a particular lived experience towards the essence (*eidōs*) that lies in the concrete or lived experience. It is the movement from the empirical to the universal. The empirical is particular while the universal is essential. At this stage, the various acts of consciousness are made accessible in order that their essences can be grasped through the intuition of essences. The intuition of essences is the process by which we form a multiplicity of all the variations of that which is given while still maintaining this multiplicity of the given, we focus our attention on the residuum; that which remains unchanged in the multiplicity. The residuum is what Husserl calls the 'invariant.'

Eidetic reduction is accomplished partially when we compare the phenomenon with other related but different phenomena. For instance, if we explore the phenomenology of secrecy using eidetic reduction, we would ask how the experience of secrecy is different from the experience of privacy or the experience of reserve? What makes the keeping of a secret different from lying? Are there different types of secrecy? Eidetic reduction evolves patterns of meaning and themes, not like theoretical or conceptual abstractions of theories, but phenomenological themes that facilitate phenomenological writing. Thus, eidetic reduction is not the same as conceptual analysis because the reduction does not try to clarify

the linguistic boundaries of a phenomenon or try to explain how a concept is used in different contexts. Eidetic reduction offers intimate meaningfulness by explaining if a particular theme or meaning brings the lived experience into view.

3.2.2 Transcendental Reduction

Transcendental reduction further reduces the residuum of the eidetic reduction to the transcendental ego through whose activity we grasp the world. At this stage, there is a phenomenological purification of the worldly subjectivity and temporality of the eidetic reduction. From this emerges the intentionality of consciousness. It is a movement from the perceptual immersion into the objects given in natural attitude to the reflective concern of consciousness itself. Therefore, it is no longer just a perceptual activity but ‘my perceptual activity.’ I am no long just conscious but conscious of something, I am no long not just thinking, but thinking of something. This is the clearest fact of the human experience; the consciousness of something. This is what we had earlier referred to as the *ergo cogito cogitatum* in distinction to the Cartesian *ergo cogito*. All the acts of consciousness are directed towards something. As Okeregbe puts it, “thus, all the activities of consciousness are conscious acts in relation to the ego, which *intends* them; all the process of *epoche* and reductions culminate in intentionality which is the structure of consciousness” (1996:254). The next unit shall explain intentionality and consciousness.

4.0 Conclusion

In this unit, we explicated the notion of *epoche* as it captures the phenomenological method of Husserl. It is a very important theme or concept in the phenomenological method. It describes the idea of bracketing our presuppositions so that we can have a direct awareness of the object of cognition. *Epoche* as a method of reductions involves three stages of reductions; namely, the phenomenological reduction, the eidetic reduction and the transcendental reduction. These stages bring us to another key theme in phenomenology, the theme of intentionality which shall be the focus of the next unit.

5.0 Summary

- *Epoche* is a method of reduction that implies a phenomenological suspension in which the individual is detached from presuppositions about the object of cognition.
- *Epoche* involves three stages of reduction; the phenomenological reduction, eidetic reduction and transcendental reduction.
- The goal of *epoche* is to attain an immediate apodictic knowledge of the phenomenon.

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

- Briefly analyse the notion or *epoche*.
- How is *epoche* a method of reductions?
- Identify and explain the three stages of reductions in Husserlian phenomenological method.

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Unit 4: Intentionality as a Key Theme in Phenomenology

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1.0 Introduction

This unit explains the notion of intentionality as a key theme in phenomenology. Phenomenology teaches that there is an intention behind every act of consciousness we perform. Intentionality here does not mean the purpose a cognitive agent has in his mind when he acts, rather, it applies primarily to the theory of knowledge. It refers to mental representations and often talked about in relation to consciousness. It is understood in phenomenology as a form of directedness towards an object; it is the characteristic of consciousness in which the individual is conscious of something.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes

At the end of this unit, the student will be familiar with the following:

1. The understanding of the use of intentionality and its centrality to phenomenology.
2. The intrinsic relationship between intentionality and consciousness.

3.0 Main Contents

3.1 Intentionality

This is one of the key concepts of phenomenology. It is ‘aboutness’ or ‘directedness’ as exemplified by our mental states. Intentionality is the directedness towards a transcendental object. By intentionality, “Husserl means that any object of my consciousness, a house, a pleasure, a number, or another person, is something meant, constructed, constituted, that is, intended by me” (Stumpf 1998:489). It is an intrinsic feature of intentional acts as against being in relation to the act. The clearest fact about our human experience is that

consciousness is always consciousness of something; it is the essence of consciousness to point toward or intend some object. The very act of intending, which is the active involvement of the ego in creating our experience is what intentionality designates. For Husserl, intentionality is “the structure of consciousness itself and is also the fundamental category of being” (Stumpf 1998:490). Therefore, intentionality is the way that subjects are in touch with the world.

The term intentionality was originally used by the Scholastics and was revived by Brentano in the 19th century. Husserl takes the concept from Brentano, although with some reservations. For instance, he maintains that most mental phenomena are intentional but not all. Pain and pleasure are mental phenomena but they are not intentional. He also agrees with Brentano that intentionality is a mark of something being mental. According to Brentano, intentionality is a sufficient condition for an act to be mental, but it is not a necessary condition for an act to be mental. Husserl however, disagrees with Brentano that every mental happening is a mental phenomenon.

Mental acts for Husserl are mental activities and not mental objects. Here, Husserl makes a distinction between two senses of consciousness: (i) Consciousness as a permanent state of awareness, and (ii) Consciousness of one thing or another. As (ii), consciousness covers the entire stream of our experiences, while as (i), it is simply the inner perception of something, that is, the intentional relation to an object. Consciousness itself is “an inner experience made up of intentional acts and some experiences that are not intentional such as sensation, e.g. of pain, pleasure, happiness, sadness” (Omogbe 2001:25). Consciousness has three aspects; (i) the subject of experience, (ii) the act of experience itself, and (iii) the object of experience. These correspond to the ego that experiences, the experience itself, and the intentional object to which the ego is directed.

The notion of intentionality draws our attention to the fact that all our beliefs, dreams, desires and wishes are about things and that even the words with which we express these beliefs and our mental states are about things. The usual problem that is associated with intentionality is the problem of comprehending the relationship between our mental states, or our expressions of our mental states, and the things our mental states are about. This relationship is characterised by a number of peculiarities. For instance, if I have a relation with a chair by sitting on the chair, it means that the chair and I exist. But how do we characterise relations that have no concrete existence? Another peculiarity is that, for instance, given that the chair I sit on is the oldest antique in Nigeria, then, my relations with it would be that I am sitting on the oldest antique in Nigeria. How do we characterise when I plan to avoid a madman and the madman happens to be my friend; but I am not

planning to avoid my friend, or can my plan to avoid the madman be interpreted as a plan to avoid my friend? According to Simon Blackburn, the interpretation seems to depend on how the object is specified, or on the mode of presentation of the object (1996:196).

According to phenomenologists, intentionality is the characteristic of consciousness. The intentional character of consciousness is simply that consciousness or experience is an act of intention or intentional act with a purpose in the external world. Intentionality underlines the fact that no act of experience is in vain because it has a purpose which is directed to something outside it. It is a logical fact that every experience must be an experience of something. It is the experience of something different and distinct from the act of experience itself. This implies that you cannot be conscious of nothing, every consciousness is consciousness about an object, and therefore, there is always an object of consciousness. For instance, to be conscious of a range rover car means the range rover car is the intentional object of one's thought. Same way, if one is conscious of a headache, the intentional object of one's consciousness is the head.

According to Owolabi, "the concept of intentionality therefore, establishes that the activity of consciousness is not a lonely act but involves something outside it" (1998:283). This means that consciousness as intentional act is a projection towards something external to it. This indicates that there is a link between the act of consciousness and the external world. This link makes the act of consciousness an intentional correlation with the external world. Therefore, consciousness without the external world cannot be. We cannot have a thinker without a thought, and the thought is always about something, an object, different from the act of thinking which is always outside the thought.

The essence of the notion of intentionality for phenomenology is that it first and foremost, establishes the fact that the object of consciousness is a logical correlation with the world. This enables the phenomenologists advance the argument that the subject of experience can, and does have a proper and adequate knowledge of phenomena or external objects, since they are intentional correlates. The implication of this for the Kantian noumenon-phenomenon distinction is that it makes the distinction a pseudo-problem. Intentionality makes things as they are in themselves always reveal themselves to be properly experienced by their intentional correlates.

The second essence of the concept of intentionality is particularly relevant to the Husserlian epistemological project. The concept of intentionality provides him the grounds to affirm the certainty of the subjective ego and the object of experience. This is because both the subjective ego and the object of experience are linked. Therefore, to accept one will necessarily mean to accept the other. This is why Husserl talked about *ergo cogito cogitatum*

instead of the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum*. For Husserl, it is “I think of something” and not the Cartesian “I think.”

The notion of intentionality is very germane to the phenomenology enterprise. It is embraced by all the strands of phenomenology; those with epistemic agenda like Husserl, or ontological, existential agenda, like Heidegger, Sartre and others. The latter category of phenomenologists sees the intentional relationship between the subjective ego and the external world as a support for the return of philosophy to confronting issues that assail the individual. Sartre, for instance, asserts that intentionality plunges man back into the world as it gives full measure to man’s agonies, sufferings and also his rebellion (1957:105).

4.0 Conclusion

Intentionality refers to ‘aboutness’ or ‘directedness’ in relation to mental states. It is the directedness towards a transcendental object. It means that objects of our conscious are constituted and intended by the individual. Intentionality goes hand in hand with consciousness because it is the essence of consciousness to point toward an object. Therefore, intentionality is seen by phenomenologists as the characteristic of consciousness. Consciousness is always about an object; we cannot be conscious of nothing; there is always an object of consciousness. For phenomenologists, intentionality establishes the logical correlation between consciousness and the world. And for Husserl in particular, it provides the basis for the affirmation of the subjective ego and the object of experience.

5.0 Summary

- Intentionality is directedness toward a transcendental object.
- Intentionality is the characteristic of consciousness.
- Intentionality establishes the correlation between consciousness and the world.

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

- What do you understand by the concept of intentionality in the phenomenological method?
- Identify two essences of intentionality.
- What is the relationship between intentionality and consciousness?

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Module 5: Philosophical Hermeneutics

- Unit 1: Hermeneutics in Modern and Contemporary Times
- Unit 2: Modern Hermeneutics: Schleiermacher and Dilthey
- Unit 3: Contemporary Hermeneutics: Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Jürgen Habermas
- Unit 4:

Unit 1: Hermeneutics in Modern and Contemporary Times

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1.0 Introduction

Hermeneutics in the modern era was largely shaped by Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey. The notion of hermeneutics as an interpretive experience was explained in reference to understanding and was considered to be against foundationalism. Hermeneutics was also seen as a historical movement that consists of the art of interpretation and a justification for the human sciences. Contemporary hermeneutics was shaped by Heidegger who introduced the ontological dimension to the hermeneutic discourse. In this unit, we shall explain these various dimensions of hermeneutics and how Schleiermacher, Dilthey and Heidegger shaped hermeneutics in modern and contemporary eras.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes

At the end of this unit, the student will be familiar with the following:

1. The various related notions of hermeneutics in the modern and contemporary eras.
2. how hermeneutics was developed as a historical movement.
3. the key figures who shaped the discourse in modern and contemporary hermeneutics.

3.0 Main Contents

3.1 Understanding the Notion of Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics as the study of interpretation plays a role in disciplines whose subject matter requires interpretative approaches. As philosophical hermeneutics, it treats interpretation as the subject matter of inquiry; thus, it is the philosophy of interpretation. In this sense, it is concerned with the meaning of interpretation; that is, the basic nature, scope and validity of interpretation and the implications for human existence. Philosophical hermeneutics is an interpretative experience.

Interpretative experience is explained in reference to understanding. When we say we understand, what do we mean? To understand implies that we have gotten at something through an attempt to interpret the thing. Conversely therefore, not to understand implies that we have not gotten anywhere with our interpretation. Understanding is therefore, a success of interpretation. Success of interpretation is educative as well as edifying. Hans-Georg Gadamer argues to establish the relationship between interpretative experience and education. Education, for Gadamer has to do with formation (*bildung*). To conceive education as formation means that education is more than a mere acquisition of expertise, knowledge or information. It involves the enlargement of our person, mostly in the arts and humanities, through extensive and variegated experience. Therefore, hermeneutics as success of understanding is educative because it enables us to learn about the ourselves, the world and other from and through our interpretative experience. When we say we understand a text, it means through our interpretation of the text we have gotten at something not from scientific experiment or indubitable epistemic foundation. That what we have gotten is not from scientific experiment or indubitable epistemic foundation does not make it less educative, since, in any case, it has expanded our views and/or change our views. It has taught us something about ourselves and the world we live.

Hermeneutics is against foundationalism. First and foremost, it is a positive attitude toward the finitude of human understanding that is epistemic, existential, ethical and political, all at the same time. Hermeneutics is not about establishing norms or methods with the claim

to help the human being eradicate or overcome aspects of his finitude. Instead, hermeneutics enables the human being recognise the consequences of his limits. Therefore, hermeneutics is an affirmation that we must be constantly vigilant about how common wisdom and prejudices inform and/or distort our perception and judgement. In this sense, hermeneutics as a positive attitude toward the finitude of human understanding opposes foundationalism.

Foundationalism presents a vertical picture of knowledge in which our body of beliefs are said to have the linear structure of a building with foundational beliefs that constitute the substructure and non-foundational beliefs that are the superstructure resting on the substructural believes.

Against foundationalism, hermeneutics emphasise the circularity of understanding which is understandable within the context of the hermeneutical circle. The hermeneutical circle is central to the notion of hermeneutics. Although it has been developed in various and distinct manners, the hermeneutic circle is broadly the notion that in interpretive experience a new understanding is achieved through renewed interpretive attention to possible meaning. This implies that a new understanding is not achieved on the basis of securely founded beliefs. In contemporary hermeneutics, the hermeneutic circle is the idea that for us to understand the whole of a text, we have to understand its parts and we have to understand the whole to understand the parts as well. It is a dialogical relation between the part and the whole in texts. It was a concept introduced to the hermeneutics discourse by Schleiermacher, even though the term itself was coined by Dilthey. In hermeneutics, it represents a path to greater understanding; and therefore, it is not seen as a problem. It is not seen as going round the circle, like we understand a circular definition. Against the idea that the hermeneutic circle makes it impossible to interpret text objectively, it rather, encourages us to understand text within its historical, cultural and literary context and our personal context. Heidegger employed it in his work: *Being and Time* to capture the complex interaction between the text and the interpreter.

3.2 Hermeneutics as a Historical Movement

As a historical movement, hermeneutics date back to antiquity. It originates in modern history in the works of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey. Its contemporary tune was shaped by Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer and others. As a historical movement, hermeneutics can be understood as: (i) the art of interpretation, (ii) the justification of the human sciences, and (iii) in terms of its contemporary dimension—contemporary hermeneutics.

3.2.1 Hermeneutics as an Art of Interpretation

According to Scholtz, Schleiermacher, who developed his hermeneutics in the first decades of the 19th century by proposing a universal hermeneutics, advanced hermeneutics as an art of interpretation. His universal hermeneutics involved all linguistic experience against the idea that hermeneutics refer to the interpretative concerns of specific disciplines alone. (Scholtz 2015:68).

For Schleiermacher, hermeneutics is the art of interpretation that avoids misunderstandings of readily intelligible discourse as a necessary discourse about paradigmatically written texts. His hermeneutics has many facets but central to these facets is the idea that “the success of understanding depends on the successful interpretation of two sides of a discourse, the ‘grammatical’ and ‘psychological’ [sides]” (George 2020:2.1). The grammatical side refers to how the meaning of the discourse depends on the general structure of the language it uses; therefore, it is a matter of general linguistic structures. The psychological side, on the other hand refers to do with how the individual authors’ or creator’s mind contribute to the meaning of the discourse which is expressed in the linguistic forms traditionally associated with style (George 2020:2.1).

Schleiermacher argues that we can differentiate discourses according to whether they are predominated by either the grammatical or psychological sides. He, however, recognises the fact that there is a reciprocity between both sides in terms of the interpretation of each side. In other words, each side contributes to the interpretation of the other side. For him generally, interpretation is aimed at reconstruction of the meaning of a discourse. The task of interpretation is to understand the discourse just like the creator of the discourse or even better than the creator of the discourse. He considers this task infinite.

3.2.2 Hermeneutics as the Justification of the Human Sciences

Wilhelm Dilthey’s contribution to the history of modern hermeneutics distinguished it as a justification of the human sciences. While Schleiermacher’s hermeneutics discourse revolved around German romanticism, Dilthey’s hermeneutics was closely associated with historicism. By historicism here, we mean a 19th century and early 20th century intellectual movement that tried to understand human nature, morality and reason as relative, changing and particular to their historical context. This is against the traditional idea that human nature, morality and reason are absolute, eternal and universal categories (Beiser 2011:1).

Dilthey’s hermeneutics project was concerned with the establishment of a critique of historical reason by which he will in turn, establish independent epistemological

foundations of research in the human sciences. In other words, he wanted to establish that the sciences can be distinguished according to their focus on historical experience. Dilthey sought to defend the legitimacy of the human sciences against the notion that the human sciences depend on the norms and methods of the natural sciences and/or that they (human sciences) lack the kind of legitimacy credited to the natural sciences (George 2020:2.2).

For Dilthey, the purpose of the human sciences is the understanding of ‘lived experience’ (*Erlebnis*), and not the explanation of ‘outer’ experience, as it is the case with the natural sciences. According to him, the understanding that we achieve in the human sciences involves interpretation. Therefore, hermeneutics helps to clarify the validity of human sciences’ research. He argues that the primary purpose of hermeneutics is to preserve the validity of interpretation against sceptical subjectivity and to theoretically justify such validity. All the certainty of historical knowledge is founded upon this validity.

3.2.2 Contemporary Hermeneutics

Martin Heidegger’s introduction of the ontological turn to hermeneutical discourse demarcated modern historical origins of hermeneutics from contemporary hermeneutics. Heidegger considers hermeneutics as an inquiry into human existence. For Heidegger, inquiry into the senses of the being of human existence is hermeneutical; it is a matter of self-interpretation. Thus, he argues that the primary concern of hermeneutics is with the methods or the foundations of research in the arts and human sciences. Such research is only possible because human beings are interpretive by their very being. Understanding, for Heidegger, is a mode of human existence that projects the interpretive possibilities that are available to us in our given situations (George 2020:3). Therefore, any inquiry into the sense of the being of human existence is an attempt to understand our own being. We interpret our being through the course of our affairs.

The introduction of the ontological turn into hermeneutics by Heidegger was a breakthrough in the historical movement of hermeneutics and his claims have continued to be a subject of discussion.

4.0 Conclusion

From Schleiermacher through Dilthey to Heidegger, philosophical hermeneutics went through various stages of development as these key figures in the discipline shaped it with their thoughts. Central to the entire discourse is the fact that hermeneutics is a theory of interpretation. Schleiermacher developed the notion of hermeneutics as an art of interpretation, Dilthey expanded this by considering hermeneutics as the justification of

the human sciences; defending the legitimacy of the human sciences against the critique that the human sciences depend on the norms and methods of the natural science. Heidegger took the notion of hermeneutics further to include the ontological dimension by arguing that it is an inquiry into human existence.

5.0 Summary

- Schleiermacher, Dilthey and Heidegger shaped modern and contemporary hermeneutics.
- Schleiermacher development the notion of hermeneutics as an art of interpretation that involves all linguistic experience and not restricted to particular texts like the bible and ancient texts.
- Dilthey expanded the notion of hermeneutics in defence of the human sciences.
- Heidegger introduced the ontological turn to hermeneutical discourse.

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

- Identify the three very prominent figures in the development of modern and contemporary hermeneutics?
- Explain the contribution of Schleiermacher to the development of hermeneutics as an art of interpretation that covers all linguistic experience.
- How did Dilthey defend the legitimacy of the human sciences?
- What was Heidegger's breakthrough impact on contemporary hermeneutics?

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Unit 2: Modern Hermeneutics: Schleiermacher and Dilthey

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1.0 Introduction

This unit explains the contribution of two significant figures in the development of modern hermeneutics; namely, Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey. They expanded the scope of hermeneutics from its particular attention to scriptural and ancient texts to include linguistic meaning in general and the historical, social and cultural knowledge.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes

At the end of this unit, the student will be familiar with the following:

1. Friedrich Schleiermacher's views about hermeneutics.
2. Wilhelm Dilthey's views about hermeneutics.

3.0 Main Contents

3.1 Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834)

Schleiermacher was the first major thinker to propose a theory of textual interpretation. He transcended the traditional view of hermeneutics and pulled together all the intellectual currents of the time to articulate a coherent conception of a universal hermeneutics. By universal hermeneutics, we mean a hermeneutics that does not relate to a particular kind of textual material like the Bible or any ancient text, but to linguistic meaning in general. He argued that along with a proper grasp of the relevant linguistic and historical facts, interpretation requires also the mental retracing and imaginative reconstruction of the way in which texts were written. In his opinion, we cannot take the understanding of other cultures for granted. The interpreter of a text needs to be in a position to see and understand

the life of the author and his work as a whole. This would enable him both the author and his works within a historical setting. This will provide the interpreter a kind of knowledge that is not attainable even to the author he interprets. The knowledge places the interpreter in an advantage position to understand the text better than the author.

The interpreter needs an openness to understand others. This openness makes it possible for us to realise that what looks natural, true, or coherent may cover something deeply unfamiliar. The kind of openness we talk about here can be achieved, if we scrutinise our own hermeneutic prejudices. This would involve a strict practice of hermeneutics, which even still does not guarantee a just or fully adequate understanding. Nonetheless, such a strict practice is an indispensable aid. It helps the hermeneutician to avoid the error of using his own cultural, theological or philosophical frame of mind as a frame or filter of another's speech or writing.

According to Schleiermacher, any use of language is between the radical individuality and the radical universality. None of these two poles exists in an entirely purified form. The individuality of language-use is not a reference to an inner, inaccessible layer of the mind, but a reference to something like the style, the voice, or the particularity of the language as used or applied.

Schleiermacher claims that to get the meaning of another person's speech or text, we need to focus on the two aspects of the person's language-use. These two aspects are;

- i. The shared resources or grammar and syntax
- ii. The individual application.

For Schleiermacher, this is the task of combining grammatical and technical interpretation. And in his opinion, there is no rule for this combination. What happens is that we compare the text with other texts from the same period, from the same writer, while we keep constantly in sight the uniqueness of the particular work in question. He refers to this as the capacity for divination. By divination he simply means the ability to move from particular to universal with the aid of general rules or doctrines. This movement or divination is done by a comparative approach combined with a creative hypothesis-making. It is only by this that we can get a better understanding. Better understanding here does not necessarily imply a fully adequate understanding. He was quick to note that to misunderstand does not mean either a state of total alienation since ordinarily we communicate most of the time successfully without fully understanding the issue of our discussion. Better understanding does not necessarily imply that we have a fully adequate understanding. That better understanding does not imply a fully adequate understand itself

does not mean that understanding is never final or that understanding can never be fully adequate.

3.2 Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911)

After Schleiermacher, Dilthey and others further developed the concept of philosophical hermeneutics. The historian, J. G. Droysen, with particular reference to historical knowledge, stressed that the knowledge gained through interpretation is different from scientific knowledge. Dilthey developed this view further and firmly established it when he explained it as the contrast between understanding and explanation. While the knowledge gained from interpretation is denoted by understanding, scientific knowledge is denoted by explanation. According to Dilthey, knowledge of historical, social and cultural facts is essentially knowledge gained through interpretation. And this, in his opinion, explains why such historico-social and cultural knowledge is radically different from the knowledge of the sciences which is a product of the application of the scientific method.

Dilthey and his compatriots basically returned to Vico's old problem. This is the problem of how to philosophically justify and account for the particular kind of objectivity in relation to the study of man. While Vico was interested in culture and history at large, Dilthey and others were more specifically focused on how we can justify the humanities within the university system that is based upon the Enlightenment ideals of critical reason and rationality. This would represent a shift from the hitherto system where authority, tradition, and theological canon were the foundations of studies in the universities.

Dilthey moved the search for philosophical legitimation of the human sciences further by arguing that the scientific explanation of nature must be completed with a theory of how the world is given to us through symbolically mediated practices. This is what the philosophy of the humanities is aimed at; to provide such a theory. With Dilthey, philosophical hermeneutics became a theory of interpretation of all bearers of meaning. Thus, it transcends just the interpretation of texts to include interpretation of human actions and the various features of human culture and society.

4.0 Conclusion

Hermeneutics in modern and contemporary times was defined by three prominent thinkers in the field; namely, Schleiermacher, Dilthey and Heidegger. This unit explained the views of the first two. Schleiermacher moved beyond the traditional view of hermeneutics as the theory of particular textual interpretation to what universal hermeneutics. By this, he expanded the scope of the discipline to include linguistic meaning in general. Dilthey

further developed Schleiermacher's position by extending the scope of hermeneutics to include a study of how world is understood by man through symbolically mediated practices.

5.0 Summary

- Schleiermacher and Dilthey represent the modern development of hermeneutics.
- Schleiermacher expanded the inquiry of hermeneutics to include linguistic meaning in general.
- Dilthey further expanded the scope of hermeneutics to cover inquiry about how man understands the world through the symbols that convey historico-social and cultural knowledge.

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

- Explain Schleiermacher's contributions to the development of hermeneutics in the modern era.
- How did Dilthey extend the scope of hermeneutics?
- What's the point of divergence and convergence in Schleiermacher and Dilthey modern hermeneutics?

7.0 References/Further Reading

Unit 3: Contemporary Hermeneutics: Heidegger, Gadamer and Habermas

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3.3 Jurgen Habermas' Critique of Gadamer

4.0 Conclusion

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7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 Introduction

Contemporary hermeneutics was largely shaped by Heidegger's new turn that introduced ontology to hermeneutical discourse. He considered the art of interpretation – hermeneutics, as closely related to the being of human existence and argued that the very art of interpretation of the sense of being of human existence is an attempt for us to understand ourselves. His ontological hermeneutics was further developed by his student, Hans-Georg Gadamer, who gave a humanistic turn to the discourse, Gadamer evolved the humanist hermeneutics which was criticised by Jürgen Habermas as politically naïve. This unit is concerned with explaining the views of these very important three figures in the evolution of contemporary hermeneutics.

2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes

At the end of this unit, the student will be familiar with the following:

1. How Heidegger introduced the ontological turn to hermeneutics.
2. The political angle that Gadamer introduced to hermeneutics.
3. Habermas's critique of Gadamer's view of hermeneutics

3.0 Main Contents

3.1 Martin Heidegger's Hermeneutics is Ontology

For Heidegger, inquiry into the sense of the being of human existence is hermeneutical. This means that hermeneutics is a matter of self-interpretation since it is concerned primarily with the methods and foundations of research in arts and humanities. The arrival of Heidegger on the scene completely transformed the discipline of hermeneutics. For him, hermeneutics “is not a matter of understanding linguistic communication, neither is it about providing a methodological basis for the human sciences ...hermeneutics is ontology; it is about the most fundamental conditions of man's being in the world” (George 2020). Although we refer to Heidegger's position as a complete transformation, it was not completely severed from earlier hermeneutical philosophies.

Heidegger talks about the hermeneutics of facticity as that which philosophy is all about. He considered terms like understanding, interpretation and assertion from new points of view and meaning. For him, understanding is a mode of being and not a method of reading or the outcome of a willed and carefully conducted procedure of critical reflection. Understanding is not something we do consciously or fail to do; understanding is something that we are. It is a characteristic of human being, of *Dasein*.

According to Heidegger, the world is familiar to us in a basic, intuitive way. It is tacitly intelligible to us. This implies that we do not understand the world through a collection of neutral facts, which in turn helps us to reach a set of universal propositions, laws or judgments that correspond to the world as it is. We are fundamentally familiar with the world and this familiarity with the world is brought to reflective consciousness through interpretation. This implies that interpretation makes things, objects and the fabric of the world, appear as something.

The synthesising activity of understanding discloses the world to us as a totality of meaning; a space in which *Dasein* is at home. Assertion brings the synthesising activity of understanding and interpretation to language. Therefore, while interpretation discloses the meaning of a thing, assertion discloses the meaning through language or brings down the meaning linguistically. It means then that the linguistic identification of a thing is predicated on the world-disclosive synthesis of understanding and interpretation. This also applies to the truth-value of the assertion. This means that the world-disclosive truth of understanding is more fundamental than the truth as presented in the propositional structure “S is P.”

In this way, Heidegger reformulates the problem of truth which gives rise to a new way of understanding the hermeneutic circle. Prior to this, the hermeneutic circle is understood as the mutual relationship between the text and tradition. Now with Heidegger's reformulation based on the ontological turn, the hermeneutic circle refers to "the interplay between our self-understanding and our understanding the world" (George 2020). Thus, the hermeneutic circle now entails an existential task that confronts each one of us.

Heidegger argues that the self-interpretatory endeavours of *Dasein* distinguish it. *Dasein* is fundamentally embedded in the world; therefore, we cannot understand ourselves without understanding the world and the world cannot be understood without reference to *Dasein*'s way of life. In other words, *Dasein*'s being is characterised by understanding; therefore, *Dasein* is always and already involved or engaged in interpretation, both of the world and of itself. This is a perpetual process. What is precarious in this process is how to enter the hermeneutic circle in the right way and not when our interpretative endeavours will lead us to a clear, lucid, and indubitable understanding of the meaning of the text and therefore, enable us to leave the hermeneutic circle. To enter the hermeneutic circle in the right way entails a willingness to realise, on our part, that the investigation into the ontological conditions of our life ought to work back on the way our life is led. This is precisely the turn towards ontology which makes the problem of philology secondary. Hermeneutics within this context now deals with the meaning or the lack of meaning of human life, for it has now taken on an existential task.

3.2 Hans-Georg Gadamer's Contributions to the Hermeneutics Discourse

Gadamer's hermeneutics is more like an incarnational approach to human existence that draws upon the Christian theology to emphasise the linguistic, historical, tradition-dependent and hermeneutical quality of human knowledge (Zimmermann 2012:1). Gadamer tried to explain the historical and linguistic situatedness of human knowing. He wanted to emphasise how necessary and productive tradition and language are for human thought. He was a student of Heidegger who took over from where Heidegger left off. He worked within the paradigm of Heidegger; accepting fully the ontological turn in hermeneutics. At the same time, however, he wanted to investigate the consequences of this turn for our understanding of the human sciences. To successfully do this, he fell back to Vico and the neo-Aristotelian strands of early modern humanism, thus, his work was considered as 'hermeneutics humanism.' Gadamer tried to synthesise the Heideggerian notion of the world-disclosive synthesis of understanding with the idea of *Bildung*. *Bildung* refers to the German tradition of self-cultivation; it implies creation, image or shape. It can be understood as education or formation; it is education in culture wherein philosophy and

education are linked in a manner that denotes the process of personal and cultural maturation. Gadamer spent more than 30 years working on, and completing this project which is articulated in his *Wahrheit und Methode – Truth and Method* (1960).

According to Gadamer, human being is a being in language. Language opens the world for us. We learn to master the world by learning to master a language. We can only really understand ourselves when we understand ourselves as beings situated within a linguistically mediated historical culture. Language is therefore, our second nature. The implication of this is for our understanding of the human sciences; namely: art, culture and historical texts, is that ever before we get the chance to approach these human sciences objectively, they have already shaped our world-view. This is because as part of our tradition, historical works present themselves to us as neutral and value-free objects of scientific investigation, as well as, they constitute part of the horizon in which we live and therefore, shape our world-view.

Gadamer opines that we never know a historical work as it originally appeared to its contemporaries. This is so because we lack access to its original context of production or to the intentions of its author. Tradition is not passive or stifling; it is always alive, productive and in constant development. It is therefore, a waste of effort to try to locate the scientific value of the humanities in their capacity for objective reconstruction as the earlier Hermeneuticians did. We get to know the past through the ever-changing and complex fabric of interpretations; this gets richer and even more complex as the decades and centuries roll by. History is always effective and never deficient; it is a unique possibility that involves the truth of self-understanding.

As far as Gadamer is concerned, rather than we addressing the text of tradition, they actually address us. The texts of tradition address us because they have passed through decades and centuries. Precisely because of this, the texts of tradition, that is, classic works of art, literature, science and philosophy, question us and our way of life. These texts expose our prejudices and the aspects of our cultural horizon that we take for granted. Historical texts have an authority that precedes our own; this authority is kept alive only to the extent that we recognise it in the present. How do we recognise this authority? We do by engaging with the text in a textual explication and interpretation; that is, by entering into a relationship of dialogue with the past. This is what Gadamer calls “the fusion of horizons.” It is a movement of understanding through interpretation between the present and the past. As we come through interpretation to understanding, what seems initially alien becomes richer and encompassing in meaning. We then begin to gain a better and more profound understanding of the text and also of ourselves. In the fusion of the horizons

what appeared initially distant and alien emerges as a function of the limitations of our own initial point of departure.

We successfully obtain the fusion of horizons when we engage with the text in a productive way. We do this through tacitly following the example of others and not through mastering a certain doctrine, method or theory; it involves a practical know-how like the Aristotelian *phronesis*. It is a kind of knowledge that cannot be theoretically deduced or be fully articulated; it depends on tact and sensitivity that is only exhibited in the form of exemplary judgments and interpretations.

Gadamer evolves his own version of the hermeneutic circle, that is, the co-determination of text and reader. For him, the way our reading contributes to the affective history by adding to the complexity and depth of the meaning of the text is as important as the interplay between the parts and the whole of a text. We cannot grasp the meaning of a text once and for all because the meaning of a text exists in the complex dialogical interplay between the past and the present. For Gadamer therefore, we can never necessarily and constitutively obtain a conclusive self-knowledge just as we can never master the text of the past. Knowledge of tradition and knowledge of ourselves are interminable process; tasks without determinate end-points. This is Gadamer's humanistic ontology; that our being is historically conditioned to be always more being than conscious being.

3.3 Jürgen Habermas' Critique of Gadamer

Habermas and Karl-Otto Apel represent the Frankfurt school which criticised the humanistic ontological turn brought into the understanding of hermeneutics by Gadamer. Habermas refers to Gadamer's hermeneutics as politically naïve. In his opinion, Gadamer does not give room for critical judgement and reflection in his hermeneutics because he placed too much emphasis on the authority of tradition. This denies reason the power of a critical and distanced judgement. According to Habermas, we need a set of quasi-transcendental principles of validity with which we can evaluate the claims of tradition and not just an analysis of the way history conditions us. Habermas argues that we need a critical theory of society to complete hermeneutics.

Take note that Habermas does not completely dismiss Gadamer's approach to hermeneutics as mistaken. Rather, his argument is that Gadamer ascribes an illegitimate universality to hermeneutics. To solve this, Habermas argues that we require an adequate standard of validity which he calls the quasi-transcendental principles of communicative reason. This will help the social sciences guide hermeneutics to adequately serve the purpose of emancipation and social liberation. This proposal carries a socio-political

undertone. This confirms that Habermas represents the strand of hermeneutics identified above as critical hermeneutics that engages in ideological criticisms.

In response to Habermas' criticism, Gadamer emphasises that he does not advocate that we dispense with validity, objectivity and method in understanding. According to him, anyone who interprets his position as such has simply misread him. Clarifying his position further, Gadamer reiterates that our situatedness within history is not a limiting condition only; in addition to limiting us, it also opens up the world to us in the sense that it is the space within which we have our human experience and reason.

4.0 Conclusion

In this unit, we briefly analysed the contributions of Heidegger, Gadamer and Habermas to contemporary philosophical hermeneutics. Heidegger introduced the ontological dimension to hermeneutics just as he did with phenomenology. Gadamer, his former student, took on and developed further Heidegger's ontological turn into his own hermeneutics humanism which Habermas criticised as politically naïve. The combination of this trio has set the tune for contemporary discourse in hermeneutics.

5.0 Summary

- Heidegger introduced the ontological turn to hermeneutics by claiming that interpretation belongs to *Dasein's* being.
- Gadamer expanded the ontological dimension of Heidegger's hermeneutics to explain the universality of the hermeneutic experience.
- Habermas criticised the political naivety of Gadamer's hermeneutics and advocates for quasi-transcendental principles of validation to evaluate the claims of tradition.

6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

- Summarise Heidegger's ontological turn in hermeneutics.
- How did Gadamer expand the ontological dimension introduced to hermeneutics by Heidegger?
- Was Habermas' critic of Gadamer's hermeneutics successful?

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