

A Philosophical Look at the Egocentric Interpretation of Self-transcendence in Man in the Light of Nietzsche

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Abstract

The concept of self-transcendence does not only exist in the concrete and experimental sense of human existence but also extends to the metaphysical realm. It goes beyond the physical world and extends itself to abstract things. That is, from material things, the concept of self-transcendence was transferred into the realm of a spiritual and abstract concept. As a result of this extension of the concept of self-transcendence to metaphysical things, we can then say that substance transcends accidents, the world of spirit transcends that of matter, God transcends the world, the soul transcends the body, intellectual knowledge transcends sensory knowledge and things of this nature. These things are really spiritual and abstract for we cannot touch them. We shall therefore at this juncture examine critically one after the other this spiritual abstract manifestation of self-transcendence to see to what extent they are true.

Keywords: Egocentric, self transcendence, Nietzsche, man

1. Introduction

Man by nature, it has been said, is an insatiable being. He is never satisfied and fulfilled within any particular state. He wants always to move beyond his present condition and consequently realize himself in the ultimate end. In other words, man seeks to transcend himself in all his activities. Man is never a static and motionless being that remains constant at any particular position. He is rather gifted with those qualities that make him an active being, full of potentialities and capabilities. What then is self-transcendence?

It is that characteristic movement of man in which he continually surpasses himself, in all that he is, all he wishes and all that he has. I mean it is that constant tendency possessed by man to always go beyond the already acquired situation in search of the supreme cause of his being, his primary origin and what should be the final end.

With regards to this, some solutions were given; for the essence of self-transcendence and egocentricism is one of them. This was however developed by modern and contemporary philosophy, above all by the representative of the existentialist current, beginning with Nietzsche. In this project, therefore, attempt is made to examine the egocentric interpretation of self-transcendence in man in the light of its greatest exponent and defender by name Freidrich Nietzsche.

Nietzsche has the belief that man, in his present life, finds himself in a precarious, pitiable, devastating, alienated, decadent, and inauthentic condition, full of deficiencies and miseries. Consequently, something has to be done in order to free man from this litany from the slavery of ignorance, error, fear and passions. Therefore, the crux of the problem lies in the recovering of the self through the acquisition of a truer and more proper being by effectuating a fuller and more complete actualization of his own possibilities. The message is that man must, as a matter of fact, be surpassed and to fully realize himself, he must shatter the fetters of metaphysics, morals and religion, and in particular, he must eliminate the idea of God.

Nietzsche, in a bid to free man from his depressed state, brought to the consciousness of all the fact that man must abandon or eliminate the idea of God, religion and morality. An exhaustive effort is therefore made towards analyzing, exposing and evaluating this surpassing of oneself in a bid to realize oneself and we shall also see why it is egocentric.

2. Methodology

It involves an expository and critical approach. Hence, the egocentric interpretation of self-transcendence in man was diagnosed, exposed, carefully and systematically examined in the light of Nietzsche. This also gives room for a well systematized and critical evaluation of Nietzsche's mind on egocentricism in man.

3. The notion and meaning of self-transcendence in man

Self-transcendence, being a quality outstanding in all human actions, has its etymological meaning, taken from the Latin word "Transcendere" which means to ascend on, elevate oneself above, cross, displace, scale, or simply going beyond. Going with this etymological meaning, the concept transcendence is attained by experience and at this level of experience, it denotes a spatial relation: the relation of surpassing, unboundedness, passing beyond, displacement in the sense of being above, outside of, etc. Consequently, we have such expressions like "to transcend one's own confines", ambient or environment, "to transcend every limit" to transcend the cloud and so one. Following this, the concept of self-transcendence is transferred now from the

realm of material or sensible to that of abstract and spiritual concept. From this angle, it therefore becomes possible to say that the substance transcends the accidents, intellectual knowledge transcends sensitive knowledge. The soul transcends the world of matter or body etc.

In our own time philosophy, the term has taken up a technical meaning. It indicates today the divine reality, namely, it can refer to the Divine (the transcendence of God). As Mondin (1985) points out, we use the term transcendence today even more often when speaking not only of God but also of man. All along, we have been talking on the transcendence of sensible objects. But we can apply the term to the subject. In this case therefore, we can talk of auto-transcendence. The term therefore indicates the property of man by which he constantly goes beyond himself in all that he thinks, wills and all that he realizes or achieves. We can say therefore that man transcends himself. He transcends himself in thought, in liberty, in language, in association and in many other things. In fact, he is ever satisfied with his achievements (Asiegbu, 1997).

3.1 The Principal Parts of Self-Transcendence

The term transcendence is divided into two principal part, namely; horizontal or historical transcendence and vertical or metaphysical auto-transcendence. While the horizontal transcendence consists of a simple going towards the future, but remaining within the horizon of space and time and therefore of history, vertical transcendence refers to the one that pushes higher, and tends to exceed the limits (bounds) of space and time, towards infinite (Mondin, 1998).

In the horizontal transcendence, man tries to overcome his cosmic limitations, and project himself to a better future like in the various technological products such as car, air-conditions, houses, medicine, airplanes, etc. The vertical auto-transcendence is seen as a movement from the phenomenal to noumenal level. Here, man tries to discover realities behind spiritual world.

3.1.1 The Egocentric Interpretation of Self-Transcendence

A careful and critical examination of the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle, Stoics, Descartes, Feurebach, Hegel and Nietzsche, reveals that man is always seen as trying to extricate himself from life shackles, alienation, entanglement or the state of oppression. The purpose of this liberation is to reinstate man back to his true nature and this of course should be done through discovering human potentialities, which will enable him to realize and actualize himself. This solution has the good of the subject as its primary objective. According to the egocentric solution. the movement of self-transcendence has its one aim, the perfection, the fulfillment, of man's being in its individual person (Mondin, 1998). This was retaken and developed by F. Nietzsche, as we shall see later.

3.1.2 The Social Interpretation of Self-Transcendence

Also called the philanthropic solution, it aims at giving humanity better state of affairs. Its target is the elimination of individualism and egoism, an attempt to create awareness in the people such that they will emancipate from individualism miseries and social inequalities and consequently arrive at perfect happiness. Many people supported this view from individual self to the entire community. They have no religious overtone. It is given a social dimension. That is, man as a social being is seen going beyond himself.

3.1.3 The Theocentric Interpretation of Self-Transcendence

The crippling and devastating individualism of the egocentric position and the incompleteness of the social/philanthropic interpretation of self-transcendence explains the need for man to search for something more permanent and reliable. Therefore, to cling on the egocentric and social interpretation of self-transcendence will amount to absolutizing the horizontal dimension of self-transcendence. When this total dependence on the horizontal level takes place, it will be very difficult for man to really surpass and assert himself. Therefore, the horizontal dimension comprising egocentric and philanthropic interpretation of self-transcendence does not provide a fertile ground for the realization of one's ultimate end. This is because the question of self-transcendence goes beyond the horizon of space and time and as such, recognizes the metaphysical dimension. This is the solution that man's self-transcendence can only be realized completely in God. Hence, the theocentric interpretation of self-transcendence centers on God and sees God as the end point of every human endeavour. God as it were, pulls all creatures onto himself due to goodness and love. God being the unmoved mover, draws every other being to himself. Some of the exponents of this view include Plato, Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, Blondel, Lonergan and others. It is therefore only in God that one can gain perfect fulfillment and consequently realizes oneself. This is the view of the theocentric interpretation of self-transcendence.

3.2 Substance and Accident

What can we say to be the meaning of substance? It can be defined as a being whose nature is to exist in itself. For instance, we can see such things like racehorse, maple tree, robin, human being etc whose centers of existence and activity remain independent. Beings that go on being what they are behind the restless face of everyday change (Sullivan, 1992).

On the other hand, accident refers to those beings that cannot exist on their own, any more than the grin on the face of the cat can be found apart from the cat (Sullivan, 1992). The basic and outstanding fact about these

ways of being (accident) is that they cannot exist on their own and so depend on some prior being for their existence. Hence an accident can then be defined as a being whose nature is to exist in another (Sullivan, 1992). The word substance is derived from the Latin term *sub* (under) *stans* (standing) and it literally means “standing under” or that which stands under. Substance constitutes the very nature or essence of a thing and accident represents any of its qualities which is not essential to its nature; for instance color, size, weight etc. Various philosophers equally contributed on the superiority of substance over accident. This was so because the concept of transcendence not only dwells on material and tangible things but also goes beyond. For Descartes, substance is an existent which requires nothing but itself in order to exist (Sullivan, 1992).

3.2.1 *Body and Soul*

The concept of transcendence is seen and experienced in the body and soul relationship. It was an issue that captured the minds and thoughts of many philosophers and theologians alike. The human soul is the principle of intellectual activity and as such, it is incorporeal and subsistent. That is to say, that the human soul in its relationship with the body can exist and operate even when it is separated from the body (Omoregbe, 1991). Consequently, the soul being the principle of intellectual life, takes the form of the human body. The transcendence of the human soul over the body is equally seen in the immortality of the soul, but the human soul is a spirit as well as soul; that is, it has activities-understanding and willing – which being intrinsically independent of the body for their exercise, indicate an act of existence equally independent of the body. There is therefore no principle of death in the soul, for neither can it be broken up into parts nor is it vitally dependent upon some other being whose destruction it would share. This is because the soul of man is spiritual as we noted earlier performs operations that are independent of matter. Aristotle and Saint Thomas Aquinas would see the human soul as the substantial form of the body as against philosophers like Plato and Descartes for whom the soul is a separate substance independent of the body to which it is accidentally united or as against the views of John B. Watson and David Hume who see the human soul as something that is unknowable or does not exist at all. The point remains that the human soul is superior to the body and many religions will support this view. This is why at the point of death as some religions hold, the soul leaves the body and does not decay and the body on the other hand decays. Therefore as spiritual, the soul of man must be the product of a direct creation; it must be immortal, for there is no principle of dissolution in a spiritual being (Grastsch, 1990).

3.2.2 *Man and the Creation of the Universe*

The creation account shows that human beings are creatures of God, made in his image and likeness (Gen. 1:27) and as such “they are the words of visible creation under God (Sullivan, 1992). The scripture made us understand that no other thing was created in the image and likeness of God except man. Hence, the only animal that resembles God is man. This resemblance is seen in our soul. This therefore bears an eloquent testimony of the superiority and importance of man over all the created things. Besides, an image is a copy of something else, resembling it in some specific ways.

Men and women are important images of God, who infinitely transcends them, because they have a specific likeness to God in virtue of their spiritual operations of understanding and willing (Grastsch, 1990). The transcendence of man over the world is also felt in the immortality of man’s soul as against other creatures of God. Whereas other things will one day perish. Besides all these, man is the only animal given the power to walk upright (*Homo erectus*). He is the only animal that is endowed and gifted with the faculty of reasoning. *Homo sapiens* and many other factors that make man unique among the creatures of God. Other creatures like plants and other lower animals cannot boast of these things. Considering the above enumerated talents and gifts to man, we see that he is really a unique being. This uniqueness therefore distinguishes him from all other creatures. For instance, man can engage himself in the production of many things in the field of science and technology. Thanks to the intellect and rationality. Besides, man is a creature that thinks and deliberates over an action before executing it and he is quite conscious of himself. That is why he can be held responsible for his daily actions. These things cannot be found among the lower animals. For instance, one cannot hold a goat responsible for eating up ones yams in ones farm or barn because a goat does not possess the above outstanding qualities which man possesses. It is not the nature of a goat to possess these things. On the other hand, man possesses all these qualities and this makes man a unique animal or being. It is because of these facts and many other ones that we say than man transcends his environment and the creatures in it.

3.2.3 *God and the Universe*

To talk about the transcendence of God over the universe is already a clear fact to the human knowledge. Our emergence into this world and the entire universe itself is the handwork of God. This is because created things cannot be greater than its creator and as a matter of fact should remain under its direction and sustenance.

In short there is nothing which is not subject to the government of God, for it is God who maintains all creatures in existence and moves all things including subordinate causes, in accordance with his will (Grastsch, 1990).

This implies therefore that there is no cause which can impede his action, because no cause can happen independent of him. God shows his transcendence over all creatures by preserving them in existence. Just as the

song is continually dependent upon the singer is it is to be heard, so the creature is continually dependent upon God if it is to exist (Grastsch, 1990). God moves and sees to the movement of all the creatures and through this movement which they receive from God, they are able to act since they cannot act outside God. Therefore, we can say that God rouses creatures from inactivity to activity (Grastsch, 1990). We can also deduce here that this movement of the universe presupposes a mover who is not moved himself by any other things since he transcends both the creatures and movement. God is indeed the prime mover, the unmoved mover and the source of the motion of the universe (Grastsch, 1990). The creature remains a contingent being deriving its existence from God and so the creature exists only as long as God sustains it (Omeregbe, 1990).

Stretching the transcendence of God over the creatures, we come to see his immutability. What does this mean? It means that “God is in no way subject to change (Grastsch, 1990). All other creatures can change from one state to another. For instance; man changing from the state of poverty to richness etc. God is eternal because he continues to exist of himself without having beginning and without the possibility of ceasing neither acquiring anything nor suffering the loss of anything. Simply put, God transcends the universe.

3.3 Manifestation of Self-Transcendence in our Daily Programmes and the World

The limitedness of man which springs up as a result of man’s boundedness within space and time does not make him wait on nature in providing for his well-being. For instance, he throws himself into creating and inventing many things. Today, man has many achievements like the construction of modern houses, reduction in infant mortality, and complete eradication of some diseases through medicines, processed food items, easy means of transportation in the air, sea and land and all these are possible due to the breakthrough in science and technology; that is the outcome of human ingenuity. In politics, man also propounds laws and the rule of life for a better conduct and happy future. Ethics also contributes its own quota. It helps to create awareness on what to do and what to guard against for the overall welfare of all. These guiding principles make man to live in peace and harmony with others. Economically, man is also making sincere efforts to ameliorate his ugly and devastating situation in the world.

Man also brings in sophisticated implement like tractors instead of relying on local implement in his farm work. But one thing remains clear and that is that man is simply seeking to transcend himself in all these actions and consequently arrive at a better condition and fulfilled life.

4. Egocentricism in Nietzsche

Many authors and philosophers have spoken on the issue of egocentricism in man and self-transcendence in general. But it was only Nietzsche who has been described as the greatest exponent and defender of this egocentric interpretation of self-transcendence in man. In his work, popularly called *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (cosiParloZarathustra) as well as in all his writings, he categorically stated: “that life in general and human life in particular is a constant force of the surpassing of one’s self (Mondin, 1998). Life pushing itself to the base of its own possibilities surpasses itself by stating its own power in the movement of its own fulfillment (Mondin, 1998). Life itself, announces Zarathustra, has confided to me this secret. I am the continuous, necessary surpassing of myself (uberwinden) (Nietzsche, 1906). He goes on: life wishes to ascend, and by ascending to surpass self. Nietzsche maintains that the goal of self-transcendence is always man, more exactly the superman. I teach you the superman, the man must be surpassed (Nietzsche, 1906). For man to fully achieve this self-realisation, freedom chains, depression and automatically gain his self-fulfilment, Nietzsche says that man must shatter the fetters of metaphysics, morals and religion, and in particular he must eliminate any idea of God. The exact message that Zarathustra carries is this: God is dead (Mondin, 1998). It is on this ground therefore that I wish to expose and analyse Nietzsche’s mind on the egocentric interpretation of self-transcendence in man. We shall however do this examination by considering his following teachings and writings.

4.1 The Death of God

Nietzsche agrees to the fact that “man in his present life, finds himself in a precarious, alienated, decadent, unauthentic situation, full of deficiencies and miseries. But there exists in man the tension to free himself from the slavery of ignorance, error, fear and passions (Mondin, 1998).

According to Nietzsche, in fear and ignorance human beings are subjected to the power of the other. This fear determines human essence and is especially characterized by lack of freedom. But this tension in man will not allow him to keep calm and watch his freedom and happiness been smashed on the ground. Man must as a matter of fact do something. He must surpass himself and in order to achieve this set goal and objective, he must eliminate the idea of God. It is against this background that Nietzsche announced his shocking discovery; that God is dead.

Have you ever heard of the madman who on a bright morning lighted a lantern and ran to the market place calling out unceasingly: I seek God! I seek God! As there were many people standing about who did not believe in god, he caused a great deal of amusement, why? Is he

lost? Said one. Has he strayed away like a child, said another or ... does he keep himself hidden? Is he afraid of us? Has he taken a sea voyage? Has he emigrated? The people cried out laughing, all in a hubbub. The insane man jumped into their mist and transfixed them with glances. Where has God gone? He called out. I shall tell you. We have killed him you and I. we are his murderers (Nietzsche, 1910).

Nietzsche however took himself to be the mad man in question who has lost God. What this implies is that some time in the past, he believed in God but now he no longer, so he refutes Him: in the joyful wisdom he comments:

Do we not hear the noise of gravediggers who are buying God? Do we not smell the divine putrefaction? For even gods putrefy: God is dead! And we have killed him. How shall we console ourselves, the most murderous of all murderers (Nietzsche, 1910).

For Nietzsche, the concept of God is hostile to our life and existence. This view was well articulated in *The Twilight of the Idols* where he stressed the fact that the concept of God was up to now the greatest objection against human life and existence. Therefore, with the death of God, the reconciliation of man and nature, individual and state, faith and knowledge, in a word the foundation of an ethical life is no longer possible. Nietzsche believed that his shocking message, that is the death of God would go a long way in destroying the universal morality which prevented man from realizing himself. This in a way involves nihilism which is a way of thinking and a psychological condition that arises as a direct consequence of the suspicion that there is really no external or internal moral authority. Under this type of condition, man can easily transcend himself in all that he does.

Before Nietzsche, many philosophers saw the world and History as being meaningful, rational and accidental. Existence itself had a purpose – a meaning. It was not blind and accidental. There was world order founded by God. The world was therefore not chaos, but an ordered cosmos in which human beings had a meaningful place. But this conception of man and entire existence collapsed in Nietzsche. He says that this does not represent the true value or picture of reality. Therefore, the philosophical and religious world views are only but expressions of man's need to avoid chaos. He saw the entire world as a world of chaos and anarchy. This forms the principal concept in his philosophy. The world for him is without a plan and is a game played by faith. He is of the view that our thinking always requires a strictly logical form and structure (Gunnar and Nils, 2001). But reality is without a form, it is chaotic. This threat of chaos call it anarchy forces us to create meaning and thus become 'metaphysical artists'. Consequently, we give form to existence and add meaning and purpose in order to survive (Gunnar and Nils, 2001).

Nietzsche wanted in a nutshell to return to human beings what had been alienated: All the beauty and sublimity we have bestowed upon real and imaginary things I will reclaim as the property and product of man. God is considered as this imaginary thing and as such, he should be done away with. The idea of his existence should not only be forgotten but be eliminated too so that man's freedom would be gained back. Therefore, Nietzsche holds that the death of God means freedom because God was an enemy of man's progress who imposed the slave morality (Christian morality) on man and thereby hinders man from developing. Omeregbe puts it thus:

God is dead, says Nietzsche and his death has set man free. The death of God is man's liberation, for man is now free from his oppressive commands and prohibitions which are obstacles to human development (Omeregbe, 1999).

It is only when the idea of God and his existence has been carefully and meticulously eliminated that human happiness can be assured once again. It is when this has taken place that man can transcend himself in all that he does. Since noting again will act as a watch-dog on him. In fact, with God gone, the sea, our sea, was never more open, never more alluring, never more demanding (Nietzsche, 1954). Thus, if God is dead, the foundation of morality and truth is gone and with this, man can easily transcend himself and by so doing realize himself.

4.2 Slave and Master Morality

According to Nietzsche, there are two types of morality, namely; slave and master morality. The slave morality, he says, originates with the lowest elements of society, the mob, the crowd, the abused, the oppressed, the slaves and those who are uncertain of themselves. He says that for the slaves "good" was seen as those qualities that serve to alleviate the existence of the sufferers, - such as sympathy, kindness, honesty, warm heartedness, patience, diligence, humility and friendliness. The slave morality is essentially utilitarian because it concerns the benefits of the weak and powerless. He continues by saying that the one that arouses fear, dread, or brings about heroism, cruelty and rudeness is evil but virtue for the master morality.

The slaves as a result of their weakness attacked the master morality since according to Nietzsche, they cannot suitably carryout their life programmes and activities under it. That is to say that the slaves cannot easily transcend themselves and so they have to look for another alternative. Consequently, the slaves have to revenge as a compensation for these things which they lack, namely the ability to transcend themselves and gain their freedom. This fact was clearly explained in the *Genealogy of Morals* where he uses this concept of resentment.

A resentment experienced by creature who, deprived as they are of the proper outlet of creation, are forced to find their compensation in an imaginary revenge. The slave morality wants to bring all men to the same level through absolute and individual moral laws applicable to all men. It prevents people from developing into strong and powerful men, for it fears such people as dangerous and evil. Thus, the slave morality is an obsolete to human development (Omeregbe, 1999). Nietzsche went on by telling us that this type of morality which is the Christian morality is only for the ignoble species of men, for it is a morality that stifles intellectual pursuit and destroys the best part of man. People that would have become great and so transcend themselves are destroyed by Christianity. Therefore for Nietzsche, this type of morality is not a fertile ground for the surpassing of oneself. One cannot realize oneself through it. Therefore, for one to realize himself, this type of morality must be done away with. It must be eliminated and replaced with the master morality since it is retrogressive and negative in nature. This is because what are virtues in the slave-morality are vices in the master-morality and what slave morality considers as vices are virtues in the master morality (Omeregbe, 1999). The Christian morality is the most effective destroyer of master morality. It is the greatest enemy of morality. Christian have weakened the feeling of life, and preached a morality which drains life of its vigour and strength. It is a crime against life; a denial of life, a moral self renunciation, a moral code calculated to shackle the ascending forces of life to prevent outstanding man from growth and render the coming of superman impossible. It is indeed a morality which puts a curse upon all human instincts, especially the strongest and most vigorous, the morality which robs life of its glory and leads to pessimism. Individuals in this type of morality are repressed, choked and suffocated. It increases the already precarious and alienated conditions of man. Taking all these into consideration, Nietzsche maintains that master morality must take the place of slave morality for man to fully assert and realize himself.

The master morality is the morality of the strong and the powerful who have liberated themselves from divine commands and prohibitions and have rejected the slave-morality. In this morality, pride, great passion, strength, instinct for war, desire for conquest, revenge, ambition, adventure, voluntuousness, egoism, self-seeking, etc are all virtues. Wars, self-assertion, violence are marks of noble spirit which should be encouraged, whereas peace, patience, meekness etc are marks of weakness of character. The master morality is a morality of power, of ruthlessness, of struggle of valour, of strength and ambition (Omeregbe, 1999).

It is a morality of man with a natural nature, who possesses unbroken strength of will and desire for power. The message Nietzsche wants to put across is simple: whoever must be a creator of values should first of all be a destroyer of values (Azenabnor, 1996). The destruction of the Christian morality and its replacement with master morality will eventually pave way for man to free himself from miseries and so transcend himself.

4.3 Revaluation of all Values

Confronted with the fact that the belief in God may destroy the value and significance of man and thus leads to a complete nihilism, Nietzsche presents us with the need to revalue all the values. This involves replacing our moral and universally accepted values with naturalistic ones. But if we ask what Nietzsche wants to put in place of the traditional religious ethics he regarded as dead, we find no clear answer. His positive prescriptions are not as clear as his critical analysis. Much of the content of his new values can be inferred from his rejection of the slave morality. Since slave morality was born out of resentment and revenge, there as need to revaluation of all values. By revaluation, he does not mean the creation of new table of moral values but rather the declaration of war upon the presently accepted values, that is, the prevalent traditional Christian values. Revaluation does not necessary mean to legislate new values but only to examine those values once again. His programme of revaluation is mainly a critical analysis of modern human ideas. He showed that what modern man called "good" was not at all virtuous, that his so called truth was disguised selfishness and weakness. Once the disguise is removed from morality, the true value will emerge. Moral values must be built upon the true nature of humanity and environment.

Revaluation therefore implies that all spontaneous motives, future and stronger motives are still extant, but that they now appear under false names and false valuations, and have not yet become conscious of themselves. Nietzsche then posited the fact that we ought to have the courage to become conscious of ourselves. Nietzsche then posited the fact that we ought to have the courage to become conscious and to affirm that which has been attained. He is also of the opinion that we have to get rid of the humdrum character of old valuations, which makes man unworthy of the best and strongest things that he has achieved. For the progress, development and complete freedom of man to take place, there must be revaluation of values. This will provide man with the opportunity of realizing himself. It is only this type of atmosphere that leads to the emergence of some "exceptional individuals" who can avail themselves of the power to reevaluate and by so doing, surpass themselves.

4.4 The Will for Power

According to Nietzsche, there is no universal and absolute system of morality for everybody to follow. Therefore,

prescribing uniform morality is to disregard the basic human differences. For him, the only basic characteristic of every human is the drive to dominate the environment. For Schopenhauer, the world is a meaningless and purposeless will to existence or will to live. He however fails to see the sense of joy and vitality that is achieved when the superior person faces the meaningless world and clear-sightedly imposes his own values on it. The superior person does not shrink from the struggle of life. He struggles blindly but wills to live deliberately and consciously. Nietzsche calls this sense of joy and vitality accompanying the imposition of values on a meaningless world “tragic optimism”. Nietzsche however accepts the fundamental notion of Schopenhauer that the will is the principle of existence, but this “will” he conceives not merely as the will to live, but as the will for power. The drive central to human nature is the will for power. The will for power, which more than the urge for survival, is an inner drive to express a vigorous affirmation of a person’s entire powers. He sees the world as a will for power and nothing else. We ourselves, he says have this will for power and nothing else. Life is essentially a striving for a surplus of power, and this exuberant instinct is good. Man does not find expression and fulfillment in miserable struggle for existence and he does not realize himself too in this type of environment. He is rather in chains and decadence such that transcending himself becomes a difficult task to embark on. But the tension in man will not allow man to remain in this condition, he has to push himself higher and transcend himself. The will for power which is more than the urge for survival provides man the tool for accomplishing this task. Therefore, the will for power, remains the drive central to human nature, a rigorous affirmation of one’s complete powers. Nietzsche therefore maintained that the world is a manifestation of the will to power (Omeregbe, 1999).

4.5 The Superman

The egocentric interpretation of self-transcendence in man was outstandingly manifested in the superman of Nietzsche. According to him, everyone should utilize his abilities. Nietzsche believes in the exercise of all our abilities in whichever way we choose regardless to conventional morality. He sees the ergo as the ability of the strong to dominate the weak and this implies the exercise of power in such a way as is deemed natural. For him, the idea of a conventional morality is the creation of the weak protesting at being suppressed by the strong, a morality of victimhood. Nietzsche further says that the weak direct all their attributes to what we call “good” because they believe that they are the ones being suppressed. This lays the foundation for Nietzsche’s concept of the superman and how he dismissed any morality that we see as natural, because if our basic form of morality is merely learn from our forebears then it has no actual objective quality. For him, these individuals cannot create new values and because of this, they prefer the old table of values. They attach themselves to it and are ready and disposed to crucify those who try to create new ones. They adhere fanatically to the life-negating values of traditional morality. Therefore, Nietzsche says that the slaves have weaker wills to power since they lack the will to create. Hence, they are attached to the old table of values. In the words of Zarathustra:

The noble wants to create something new and a new virtue. The “good” want the old and that the old be preserved (Nietzsche, 1968).

Having seen slave morality as corrupt, in place of it, he proposes superman, the creator of a new heroic morality that would consciously affirm life and the life values. The superman represents the highest passion and creativity and would live at a level of experience beyond the conventional standards of good and evil. His creative “will to power” would set him off from “the herd” of inferior humanity. *Übermensch* or superman is not superior in breeding or endowment, but in power and strength. In his book, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Nietzsche proclaims “not humanity but superman is the goal (Copleston, 1985), man is something that must be surpassed, man is a bridge and not a goal (Copleston, 1985).

This does not mean that man will evolve into superman by an inevitable process. Superman is a myth, a goal for will. Superman is the meaning of the earth. “The superman is beyond good and evil, he creates his own values, he has liberated himself from belief in God and has rejected the slave morality (Omeregbe, 1999). Superman cannot come unless superior individual have the courage to trans-value all values, to break the old table of values especially Christian value and create new values out of their superabundant life and power. The new values will give direction and a goal to the higher man and superman is as it were their personification. Nietzsche has formally agreed that man finds himself in a precarious and decadent condition, full of deficiencies and miseries and that there is a tension within man pushing him always to free himself from this dangerous situation. This is exactly what the superman of Nietzsche has come to do. To free man and place him in a better condition; for the intent of self-transcendence is to recover the self through the acquisition of a truer and more proper being by effectuating a fuller and more complete actualization of one’s own possibilities.

Hence, the superman for Nietzsche is the man who has become fully free and independent and as such assets himself. He is the new God who dwells on earth.

5. Related thought

Every philosophical thought it has been argued has a precursor either directly or indirectly. No wonder Gadamer

says that no person speaks from nowhere. To speak or say anything presupposes a background. Following this famous dictum of Gadamer, we would expose and systematically analyse different areas of life and philosophies in which people and philosophers alike said one thing or the other on the issue of self-transcendence in man.

5.1 Epicureanism

Epicurus who existed between (342-270 BC) was the founder of Epicureanism. Like the cyrenaics, Epicurus made pleasure the end of life. Everything being strives after pleasure and it is in pleasure that happiness consists (Copleston, 2003). We affirm that pleasure is the beginning and end of living happily. According to him still, pleasure is the standard for judging actions as right or wrong, and all our decisions regarding what should be done or what should be avoided are based on pleasure (Omogegbe, 1993). Pleasure however means for Epicurus the freedom of the body from pains and of the soul from confusion. The ethics of the Epicureans is fundamentally selfish or egocentric because it is based on the individual's pleasure (Copleston, 2003). Man by nature has the potentials for both selfishness and altruism because he is by nature both individual and social. Whether a person becomes selfish or altruistic depends on which of these potentialities he develops (Omogegbe, 1993). The Epicureans develop theirs along the happiness of the individual person. Its major concern is the individual's welfare only. Therefore, it is self-centered. The pleasure of the subject that is man is the only authentic thing for Epicurus.

5.2 Humanism and the Enlightenment Period

Humanism according to the *Dictionary of Philosophy* means any view in which the welfare and happiness of mankind in this life is primary. This word humanism was taken from the German word which means any system which put human interest and mind as paramount; rejecting supernatural. Rejecting the belief in all forms of supernatural paves the way for considering the greater good for all humanity on this earth as the supreme ethical goal, consequently relying on the method of reason, science and democracy for the solution of human problems. At this period, the assumption that religion provides the ground of human existence came to a sharp criticism with the elevation of man as a substantive subject in whose hands lies his own perfection. It was indeed a period that was characterized by the fighting and struggle of brining man and human reason back from political shackles as well as from superstition and ignorance. God as the foundation of human existence was grossly discarded and buried in the mud, and in place of him human reason was highly elevated and recognized as the only valid source of knowledge and happiness. For them, the human reason (rationalism) could save man from his precarious and alienated conditions characterized by the unfreedom of ignorance, illusory promises of religion, and enslaving obedience to authority. This period therefore laid the rational foundation of modernism characterized by an unflinching confidence that notwithstanding the diversity in beliefs and points of view, reality can be known through human reasoning and scientific methods. The welfare and the happiness of man remains the motivating factor in this period. The value and dignity of man is highly recognized and he is seen as the measure of all things. In short, the world has become a human world and is determined by human aspirations. No wonder Robert C.S. noted that the world may have been created by God, but is was now in the hands, for better or worse of humanity. The world was indeed a human stage with human values, emotions, hopes and fears and thus humanity was defined in turn by a universal human. Man is at the centre of all activities. However, this modern humanism is not concerned with human being in general but is rather concerned with human being as absolved subject. Consequently, the essence of human being in this period is that of subjectivity. Man remains the beginning and end of everything one can imagine.

5.3 Capitalism

This is an economic system that supports self-transcendence in general and egocentricism in particular. Essentially, capitalism is associated with economic freedom or freedom of industry and enterprise (Nwoko, 1988). It is an independent economic system which encourages vividly the ultimate ownership or possession of goods individually. It carries out this operation by canvassing for the personal ownership of the means of production and also by providing enabling environment that will lead to the realization of the individual's potentials and the ultimate refinement of the self. Capitalism in its policies and actions based on its egoistic altruism is activated by selfish motives and is bound to impoverish the helpless masses to enrich a few (Nwoko, 1988). This economic system does not give room for the common good of all rather it is totally concerned with the ultimate betterment of the individual even at the detriment of the other person. In fact, Capitalism is an incorrigibly planless system because every person is after his own self-interest (Nwoko, 1988). People who hold this view is those who support capitalism see themselves often as the lord and master of their life and existence. Consequently, their relationship and communication with the wider society will be cast to the wind. It generates some sort of class opposition and conflicts between the capitalists and proletariat and fertilizes the ground for social inequality. This creates a very big yawning gap among the people in the society. For instance, the rich will be getting richer and the poor getting poorer. However, we are not trying to lay aside the good aspect of

capitalism but to point out the fact that attention is only paid to the individual in a bid to better his condition and so realize himself.

5.4. *Marxism*

Marxism is a philosophical, social and economic theory developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. This group of philosophers define self-transcendence simply as man. The theory advocates a classless society where everybody works for the common good of all. Since in the capitalistic state, there is no freedom as the proletariat are controlled by the capitalists; Marx insists that a labourer must extricate himself from the slavish situation if he wants to achieve freedom. For Karl Marx therefore, self-transcendence is never on the vertical dimension rather on the horizontal since everything happens within the horizon of space and time and does not transcend to the infinite. No wonder he agrees with Feuerbach that God is nothing other than a projection of the best qualities in man and that religion is man's self-alienation (Omoregbe, 1993). Therefore, what this implies is that man is the measure of all things and he remains the beginning and end of everything. There is no need then for man to look up to God in order to free himself from his precarious condition. He interpreted man on material level on the ground that matter is the ultimate matrix in every reality and in particular in every human expression. Man then is the highest expression of material development. Matter is the absolute principle, and the essence of man is his ability to transform the world to suit himself. Through labour, man discovers and elevates his dignity, therefore man is a creature of man and that gives him a privilege position in the universe.

Feuerbach on his own tendered an anthropological doctrine which tried to destroy transcendence and reduce man to an imminent reality. He engaged himself in a metaphysical abstraction in his conception of the human person. "The divine essence Feuerbach had said, is nothing else than the essence of man (Omoregbe, 1993). This means that the content and object of religion is absolutely human. The mystery behind theology is anthropology; the mystery of divine being is simply human being. What this means is that man is the supreme being to man. The supreme law is love of man towards man. Hence, he says, "homo homini: Deus est" meaning that man is God to man. The base of Feuerbach's anthropology is the destruction of God because for him, the existence of God impoverishes man and alienates him.

5.5. *Existentialist*

The existentialists were the first philosophers to pay a decisive and critical attention to the phenomenon of self-transcendence. These philosophers see self-transcendence as constituting the essence of the human being, that is, an essence that consists effectively in this; in the being outside-of self, existence, projected constantly not to what it already is, not to the past and the present, but towards the future possibilities (Mondin, 1998). Some of these philosophers include Jean Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger, Karl Jasper, Abbagnano and others. Let us then examine their views on this issue of self-transcendence.

Abbagnano in describing what self-transcendence means, says: the being which I in my finiteness am interweaved goes beyond me continually. It carries me continually beyond myself with the same continuity with which I decide of myself.

Jean Paul Sartre would say: what gives man dignity is his possession of a subjective life, that is, that man is a being which constantly moves towards a future and is conscious that he is doing so. He maintains that the conscious nature enables him to seek the future constantly; hence self-transcendence makes it possible for man not only to create himself but also to be responsible for himself and his future.

For Heidegger, self-transcendence is a fundamental constituent of the Dasein who is essentially an existens, that is to say, something that remains outside of itself. Man is in fact characterized by an essential going beyond the factual situation, towards his ulterior possibilities (Mondin, 1998). For him, this going beyond ends up in nothingness – death. Death he says is the ultimate possibility of man. This is because for man to fully realize himself, he has to die. That is to say that self-transcendence operates within the horizon of time and has death as its unavoidable and inevitable end.

Finally, Karl Jasper holds that self-transcendence is realized in what he calls "Grenz-situationem" or borderline situations. Self-transcendence explains the existential situation of man which is more of pains, strife, anxiety and death. Man strives always to do away with these situations and he does this by seeking an ultimate satisfaction. He maintained that these kinds of situations are unavoidable in life, and therefore, provide occasions for auto-transcendence. However he concludes that his type of self-transcendence is too limited. The Grenz-Situationem that Jasper talked about is the recognition of the contradiction between what one is and what one aspired to be. The movement of this recognition is the moment of transcendence, he says.

6. **Critical Evaluation and Conclusion**

In our discussion so far, we have been exposing and analyzing the egocentric interpretation of self-transcendence in man, in the light of Nietzsche. It was an attempt he made towards liberating man from his life of miseries and decadence. The question any rational being will ask is whether Nietzsche actually succeeded in his project of

restoring man's freedom? Can we say that with all his teachings that one can completely gain self-fulfillment in transcending oneself? The mind-boggling question is what we intend to look at in his critical evaluation.

6.1 Critical Evaluation

The egocentric solution as we know already sees the final goal of self-transcendence in the realization of human potentials, and the refinement of the human being. The goal of self-transcendence in this solution is the improvement of each human person by providing the necessary opportunity for him that will lead to the harnessing of his potentialities and capabilities. Looking at the egocentric interpretation of self-transcendence from his vantage point, that is, from the point of giving the individual the opportunity and recognition of the human values, and talents, and the need to make efforts in expressing those talents, we say that it has something positive to offer to humanity. On this ground too, we can agree with Nietzsche to the extent of the opportunity which the individual possesses through which he can realize himself. The good quality of these values and talents is that it has given people the forum of utilizing and manifesting their talents in different ways. Today, people are able to create, develop, think up, and formulate many things that greatly help in the betterment of human life and existence. Looking around, one will find some of those areas of man's effort in realizing himself like the world of science and technology. We can now boast today of a better means of transportation in the air, sea and land. We equally have such improvement in the eradication of some dangerous diseases, establishment of communication media like the internet, hand set and many other things. All these things are completely seen and regarded as the result of human ingenuity.

Stretching this point further, it shows that in every human being, there is always more room for growth, development and improvement for man is not a static object. He is a moving being with some potentialities and abilities that needed to be tapped and harnessed. Man should therefore make effort always in revamping himself in these opportunities that have been given to him; for there is always more room for improvement as we mentioned earlier.

However, there are some loopholes in this egocentric interpretation given by Nietzsche. For instance, he holds that for man to surpass himself, he has to shatter the fetters of metaphysics, morals, and religious and must in particular eliminate any idea of God. What this means for Nietzsche is that auto-transcendence does not go beyond the horizon of space and time. It is horizontal and consists of simple going forward, a movement towards the future and is historical. It is only concerned with man's effort to overcome his cosmic limitations and project himself. Everything ends within here and now. There is no going beyond the phenomenal level in man's effort to recover himself from his alienated condition.

But from our daily life and experiences, we notice that this type of self-transcendence does not lead to ones ultimate end. It does not give ultimate solution of man's problems in life since it is based on the horizontal and is therefore temporary in nature. For instance, at the point of dangerous and pitiable circumstances in life, like serious sickness and death, this position does not help the sufferer or the dying person to see the meaning of all he has lived for. People who have lived according to this position often end up in despair and meaninglessness especially at those senseless moments of life's tragedies or contradictions. The existential insufficiency of this type of self-transcendence is very much seen and felt in the increasing boredom and meaninglessness which is today experienced in the industrialized world where people seem to be convinced that meaning lies in being absolutely free to express themselves, acquire as much money as possible, and even enjoy every kind of experience. But one thing is categorically clear. It is the fact that there does not seem to be a direct relationship between this kind of total self-expression and a sense of meaningfulness of one's life. It is indeed very devastating and terrible. The landmark that man has made today in science and technology has not even solved all the problems of man. There still abound many confronting and heart-breaking problems that have left man with the question: where shall my help come from? Therefore, the issue of self-transcendence operating within the horizon of space and time does not help matters. Consequently, the elimination of morality, religion and even God which Nietzsche campaigned for in a bid for man to surpass himself does not help out too. It will rather create a lawless and disordered society which will later pave way for the survival of the fittest. This will of course increase the precarious and alienated nature of man which Nietzsche has set out to recapture. What a contradiction!

Reacting against Nietzsche's stand on this issue of self-transcendence, Pannenberg tells us that the aim of self-transcendence is neither the world, nor even man in his critical products, but only God (Mondin, 1998). Man as a spiritual being composed of body and soul seeks always to reconnect with the supernatural being who is God. He is not satisfied with the phenomenal world and so he wants to go beyond it.

Therefore, the infinite tension of man that pushes him to go beyond all of what he has embraced with his thought, willed with his will, imagined with his fantasy, and realized with his actions, can be comprehended only if it is seen as the research of God. (Panneberg, 1974)

This is because "man does not rise from the confines of his own being so as to submerge himself in nothingness, but rises from himself to immerse himself in God, who is the being capable of taking man to the

perfect and perennial realization of himself (Mondin, 1998). We are not trying to transverse the area of philosophy to theology or religion but some of the existential problems that confront man in his daily life as mentioned earlier, have come to prove that all our problems and desires cannot be solved within the horizon of space and time and so it needs something that is “infinite”. This confirms famous dictum of Saint Augustine “Thou have created us for thyself, o God, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you (Augustine, 1960). The ultimate sense of self-transcendence is situated beyond man himself and is found in God. No wonder Merleau – ponty has judged foolish the attempts to oppose horizontal transcendence and vertical transcendence, ascribing to the former what belongs to the latter and conceiving of history as infinite, like “an exterior potency” of which man would be nothing but the instrument, without internal substance. This is why Max Scheler asserts that “man is the bearer of a tendency which transcends all the possible vital values and which is directed towards the divine, or, in short, man is a being that seeks God (Scheler, 1973) Furthermore, man’s search for God in a bid to transcend himself and as such solve his problems is connected with the fact that he is a being “radically gifted with a spiritual being; that he belongs, therefore to the reign of the spirit, which is the only reign of absolute values, and not to the one of matter, which is instead the reign of instrumental values, and not to the one of matter, which is instead the reign of instrumental values, values subject to space – temporal mutations and to corrupt, just as matter itself if subject to (Mondin, 1998).

From our discussion so far, one can see that the issue of self-transcendence goes beyond the “extrinsic” manifestation and points to the spiritual element in man. This is possible because man transcends himself in all he does, says, wishes and desires, taking off in time, from the material and acquires more perfect states of being, both for himself and the society. The fact remains that man cannot accomplish this if he was limited to the categories of space and time, quantity and matter. In other words:

Man constantly pushes himself beyond the space – temporal confines that encircles him, rises above the entire world of experience, values and judges the present and the past and can even prefigure and program himself for the future because he carries in himself an element of immateriality, of spirituality; because he possesses an interior dimension of a spiritual nature: the soul, the mind, the spirit (Mondin, 1998).

Egocentric interpretation of self-transcendence should not be seen therefore as an end itself. It is only as aspect of self-transcendence in man. This being the case, it does not lead one to one’s ultimate end in one’s existential struggles.

6.2 Conclusion

The notion of self-transcendence no doubt is part and parcel of human life and existence. Therefore, everything one does is characterized by this fact of self-transcendence. Nietzsche however took one dimension of the different interpretations of self-transcendence which is egocentricism and this of course forms the major part of this work. He maintained that for man to fully gain freedom and so realize himself, he must do away with morality, religion and any idea of God. For him, these things (morality, religion and God) curtail the freedom of man and enslave him. Hence, man he says to make effort to extricate himself from these troublesome conditions. Inasmuch as we accept the fact that man has to make effort in transcending himself and so gains self-fulfillment, he must not necessarily eliminate the idea of God. However, we have to understand that Nietzsche as an Atheist and so he was greatly influenced by this. In concluding this work, we have to note clearly that the root of self-transcendence is something that is purely spiritual, because it reveals the other dimension of man – the soul. Self-transcendence finds its profound foundation in this element of “spirituality of the soul”. Consequently, self-transcendence does not end in the horizontal sense as Nietzsche posited, it rather goes and points to God who is the mover of all things.

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