

The Existential Concept of “Subjectivity Is Truth” In Paulo Coelho’s *The Alchemist*

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Abstract

The existential concept of ‘subjectivity is truth’ and the ‘Crowd is untruth’ which promulgated by the existential philosopher Soren Kierkegaard paved way for creative thinking and asserts the dictum of Socrates ‘know thyself’ in the annals of History. Socrates believed in an objective good that can be comprehended by an individual through rational examination, he was in pursuit of truth or wisdom. This paper aims at exploring the nuances of understanding the potentials of oneself within with special reference to Santiago, the protagonist of Paulo Coelho’s ‘The Alchemist’, who follows his dream, achieves it and proves his existence .

Keywords

Subjectivity, existential, know thyself, individual, dream, truth, wisdom, Philosophy.

“The Subjective thinker is not a man of science ,but an artist. Existing is an art . The subjective thinker is aesthetic enough to give his life aesthetic content, ethical enough to regulate it, and dialectical enough to penetrate it with thought”
(Soren Kierkegaard)

Life unfolded the concealed riches only when a journey to the interior accomplishes the arena of affirmative believing beyond constructive thinking. ‘As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he’ says the Bible. In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to Philosophical Fragments*, Soren Kierkegaard a 19th century Danish philosopher who has

been called as the “Father of Existentialism” affirms in the pseudonym Johannes Climacus that ‘Subjectivity is Truth’ and ‘Truth is Subjectivity’.

Existentialism is the search and journey for true self and true personal meaning in life. Existence is always particular and individual. While objective facts are important, there is a second and more crucial element of truth which involves how one relates oneself to those matters of fact. Subjectivity refers to what is personal to the individual –what makes the personage who he is in distinction from others. It is what is inside-An individual can see, feel ,think, imagine, dream, etc..It is often contested to objectivity-that which is outside the individual. Another way to construe subjectivity is the unique association between the subject and object.

Kierkegaard was inspired by Socrates, Greek philosopher who is considered as father of philosophy, whose incessant irony assists the birth of subjectivity in his interlocutors. The problem of what humans are in themselves can be discerned in the Socratic imperative “know thyself,” Through Plato’s dialogues , *The Euthphro & the Apology* ,Socrates influenced him in several concepts: Aporia or being at a loss, as a gadfly of Athens, his Daimon or personal spirit finally Maieutics , the art of midwifery. Socrates believed in an objective good that

can be comprehended by an individual through rational examination, he was in pursuit of truth or wisdom.

Socrates declared his divine voice called Daimon foiled him from doing particular things. Daimon's relation in instructing Socrates was strictly negative according to Kierkegaard who sides with Plato's narration of Socrates. Due to such stance, he estranged himself from the Athenian society affording himself subjective freedom. In ancient Greek society the Oracle at Delphi was a venerated religious institution. It was alleged that the God Apollo spoke through the priestesses there. Whenever an important decision to be made either about some private or about some larger matter of state, it would be typical that one would go to the oracle in order to ask the god if the proposed plan would prosper. But Socrates recommended Daimon, his private spirit which directed him, instead of the Oracle at Delphi because Socrates believed that each individual is different and there is no objective spirit or truth.

Kierkegaard believed that God is subjective so the divine experiences or truth of each human must be subjective. Subjective truths are truths worth an individual's total self-commitment. As an existentialist, Kierkegaard's chief focal point is with an individual and not with the collective abstracts and he believes that objectivity is a servant and not a master. Reason is a servant and will is the master. Sartre's introduction to *Being and Nothingness* has been put together in a book *Existentialism and Humanism* which is regarded as the defining text of Existential movement. The book encapsulates his catchphrase 'Existence Precedes Essence'

meaning that there is no exterior controlling factor to delineate the goal of an individual.. It goes parallel with the quote from Kierkegaard that 'Our life always expresses the result of our dominant thoughts' and that posits the theme of 'The Alchemist by Paulo Coelho.

Paulo Coelho's 'The Alchemist' is a story of a shepherd boy from the Spanish province of Andalusia who dreams of travelling the world in exploration of a treasure as desirable as any ever found which reverberates the following quote "when you want something all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it." This enchanting line forms the subject matter of the book and resounds through the story.

Santiago starts on his journeying without knowing the destiny or the itinerary to achieve it. He leaves behind his family tradition of priesthood only to find an answer to his importunate dream of being a shepherd. Santiago gives priority to his own choice, he pays attention to his heart. He is not directed by the external forces though they tend to be an impediment in the course of his life. On his way, he meets several people like Melchizedek – the king of Salem, the shopkeeper who gives him the job, the English man of the caravan, Fatima with whom Santiago falls in love, the Alchemist – the possessor of the elixir of life, the Gypsy women who knows about the pyramids of Egypt. Each one of them put diverse impressions on his mind for example the old king Melchizedek stirs him through the 'Personal Legend', which is "what you have always wanted to accomplish. Everyone



when they are young knows what their Personal Legend is”.

As maturity curbs us from listening to our own self, we are unknowingly lured into a riddle, an escape from which is not known. In the story too there comes a time in the journey of Santiago where he finds it difficult to chase his ambition because the stumbling blocks that cross on his way try to chain him down to one place but then he meets the crystal merchant who makes him aware of the consequences of unfulfilled dreams. So, in spite, of having several hardships he does put an end to his quest. Thus, Coelho takes up a simple tale of the pursuit of one’s destiny and turns it into a magical fable by the use of incidents and situations that illustrate human destiny and divine intercession. As Sartre says ‘free will exists’, so does the ‘Will’ of Santiago transmits him on his way to success overcoming the hurdles that lie in between.

Subjective force in Santiago sets him apart from many other characters in the novel , he survives for his inner desire not for external forces. In the beginning part of the story when he leaves his family, the very idea of a learned personality taking up the job of a Shepherd discriminates himself from his father as a subjective thinker, who values the insight ‘subjectivity is truth’ and the ‘crowd is untruth’

“The boy could see in his father’s gaze a desire to be able, himself, to travel the world- a desire that was still alive, despite his father’s having had to bury it, over dozens of years, under the burden of struggling for water to drink, food to eat, and the same place to sleep every night of his life.”(10)

After his meeting with Melchizedek he reassures his choices of becoming a traveler, the old king insisted on ‘Personal Legend’ and also talked about a baker who hopes for achieving his dream after accumulating wealth but the baker “never realized that people are capable, at any time in their lives, of doing what they dream of” which mobilizes Santiago from stagnation and he starts his adventure with a zeal.

In the middle part of the story when he embarks on his treasure hunt through Tangier, he is robbed and left penniless by a stranger. Santiago loses all his hope in life and ‘wept because God was unfair and because this was the way God repaid those who believed in their dreams’. Soon he makes progress from the state of frenzy, and joins in a crystal shop until he earns for his travel to Africa where the treasure is supposed to be. The crystal shop owners is pining to set off to Mecca but has never tried because his inner call is diminished by the external force of maintaining the crystal shop. The crystal merchant affirms the never yielding spirit of Santiago when he assures that he is different from him, because he wants to realize his dreams.

Santiago’s treasure hunt unfolds stuff which he would not have imagined. He gets the acquaintance of the Alchemist, listens to the voices of the desert, helps the tribal, wooed with Fatima and identifies the soul of the world apart from the hidden treasure. Several factors bring to a standstill his pursuit of the dream but with patience he rejuvenates like an eagle and soars high. He achieves his dream after several slogs and quandaries but



his spirit never succumbs but he started his expedition once again for Fatima a woman of the desert, waiting for his return and values that love never keeps a man from pursuing his destiny.

Santiago would be compared to Alfred Lord Tennyson's 'Ulysses', who has the Zeal to perform what he wishes with the divine help. He aims to 'drink life to the lees' without taking rest from travel and he always roams with the hungry heart to prove his survival like Ulysses. By going corresponding with the spirit of Greek Odysseys (Ulysses), Santiago finds it extremely difficult 'to pause, to make an end'. As bringers of new things both the protagonists follow knowledge like a sinking star.

The Alchemist by Paulo Coelho is a journey to the interior which everyone must have. If a man understands his own subjective truth, he can also understand the objective sphere. Even rational thinking liable to be proved wrong when the spirit of God encompasses the human and the man attains the essence of human existence mentioned by Kierkegaard that aesthetic enough to give his life aesthetic content, ethical enough to regulate it, and dialectical enough to penetrate it with thought"

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