



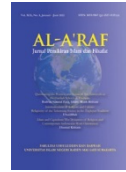
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## SOREN KIERKEGAARD'S EXISTENTIALISM: A STUDY ON HOW TO ENJOY LIFE DURING THE POST-TRUTH ERA

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### *Abstrak*

**Kata Kunci:**

Eksistensialisme,  
Era-Post  
Kebenaran,  
Soren Kierkegaard

*Studi ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan cara mendapatkan kesenangan dalam hidup selama era pasca-Kebenaran dengan mengacu pada nilai-nilai eksistensial Soren Kierkegaard. Pendekatan kualitatif diadopsi dengan desain konseptual, menggunakan metode eksploratif, interpretatif, dan analitis. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa individu mampu mendapatkan kesenangan dari kehidupan selama Era Post-Truth dengan merangkul nilai-nilai eksistensialisme berikut Soren Kierkegaard: Pertama, menjadi diri sendiri; hidup di bawah narasi hati dan pikiran. Kedua, menjadi moral dan mematuhi aturan universal. Ketiga, menjalani kehidupan agama, memiliki hubungan langsung dengan Tuhan, dan kritis terhadap agama. Studi sebelumnya telah secara luas mengeksplorasi eksistensialisme Soren Kierkegaard, tetapi tidak ada yang secara khusus memeriksa konsepnya sebagai sarana untuk menikmati hidup.*

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## Abstract

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### Keywords:

Existentialism,  
Post-Truth Era,  
Soren  
Kierkegaard

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This study aims to explain the means of deriving enjoyment in life during the post-Truth era by drawing upon the existentialist values of Soren Kierkegaard. A qualitative approach is adopted with a conceptual design, utilizing exploratory, interpretative, and analytical methods. The results showed that individuals derive enjoyment from life during the Post-Truth Era by embracing the following Soren Kierkegaard's existentialism values: Firstly, being oneself; living under the narrative of the heart and mind, being moral, and adhering to universal rules. Thirdly, living a religious life, having a direct connection with God, and being critical of religion. Previous studies had extensively explored Soren Kierkegaard's existentialism, but none specifically examined its concept as a means of enjoying life.

## Introduction

As the era progresses, the means of deriving enjoyment has also evolved. Humans, as inhabitants of this Earth, accompanied by a variety of animals, plants, and the universe in general, are faced with the role of protecting and preserving the Earth created by God, to the best of their ability. The control over the sustainability of the Earth can be said to be in the hands of humans.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the universal values of human life, which entail unity, justice, and equality should be steadfastly upheld. This ensures humans maintain a unified understanding that the well-being and sustainability of the Earth lie within their hands.<sup>2</sup>

In the context of the Post-Truth era, certain facts need to be acknowledged. This era is understood as a situation where objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than personal emotions and beliefs.<sup>3</sup> This development should be perceived as a challenge for human civilization to continually uphold universal values.<sup>4</sup> Mistakes made in the

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<sup>1</sup> Hoating Li, "Classroom Enjoyment: Relations With EFL Students' Disengagement and Burnout," *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (2022), <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.824443>.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas W Pogge, "Human Flourishing and Universal Justice," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 16, no. 1 (1999): 333–61, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265052500002351>.

<sup>3</sup> Patrik Fridlund, "Post-Truth Politics, Performatives, and the Force," *Jus Cogens* 2, no. 3 (2020): 215–35, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42439-020-00029-8>.

<sup>4</sup> Viktor Denisenko, "Disinformation Analysis and Citizen Activism in the 'Post-Truth' Era: The Case of DebunkeU.Org. In J. Chakars & I. Ekmanis (Eds.), *Information Wars in the Baltic States: Russia's Long Shadow*," *Springer International Publishing*, n.d., 169–186, **AL-A'RAF**– Vol. XXI, No. 1, June 2024

Post-Truth era can have an impact on the stability of universal values, which are echoed by all religions. For example, the dissemination of hoax news, rumors, SARA issues, fake news, or information containing hate speech poses a threat to the integrity of humanity, invites injustice, as well as disrupts human equality.<sup>5</sup>

The challenges faced by humans in the Post-Truth era require adept handling. The goal is for humans to refrain from interfering in the lives of others or undermining agreed-upon universal values. However, the question is How can humans enjoy life in this Post-Truth era without compromising their freedom as individuals, while also respecting others and preserving universal values? The value of existence in Soren Kierkegaard's thought is relevant to the times and can be an ethical source to fortify post-truth circulation.<sup>6</sup>

An overview of a study on existentialism Soren Kierkegaard can be found in the following scientific works. First is Tri Astutik Haryati's study focused on comparing the concept of humans between the thoughts of Soren Kierkegaard and Muhammad Iqbal.<sup>7</sup> Second is Mahmudah examined the main teachings of Soren Kierkegaard's existentialist philosophy and its relevance to Indonesia's educational goals.<sup>8</sup> Third is Armaidly Armawi examined Soren Kierkegaard's philosophical thoughts

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[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-99987-2\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-99987-2_9).

<sup>5</sup> Sarit Barzilai & Clark A. Chinn, "A Review of Educational Responses to the 'Post-Truth' Condition: Four Lenses on 'Post-Truth' Problems," *Educational Psychologist* 55, no. 3 (2020): 107–119, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2020.1786388>.

<sup>6</sup> Michael A. Peters, "Education in a Post-Truth World," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 49, no. 6 (2017): 563–566, doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2016.1264114>; Ari-Elmeri Hyvönen, "Careless Speech: Conceptualizing Post-Truth Politics," *New Perspectives* 26, no. 3 (2018): 31–56, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2336825X1802600303>; Stephen Lewandowsky, S., Ecker, U. K. H., & Cook, "Beyond Misinformation: Understanding and Coping with the 'Post-Truth' Era," 2017 6, no. 4 (n.d.): 353–369, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jarmac.2017.07.008>.

<sup>7</sup> Nik Haryanti, "Implementasi Pemikiran KH Hasyim Asy'ari Tentang Etika Pendidik," *Episteme* 8, no. 2 (2013): 439–50.

<sup>8</sup> Mahmudah Mahmudah, "Filsafat Eksistensialisme: Telaah Ajaran Dan Relevansinya Dengan Tujuan Pendidikan di Indonesia," *INSANIA: Jurnal Pemikiran Alternatif Kependidikan* 14, no. 3 (1970): 336–447, <https://doi.org/10.24090/insania.v14i3.357>.

with a focus on human existence.<sup>9</sup> Fourth, Dian Ekawati examined liberal constructive education in the view of existentialism and its relation to existing and future problems.<sup>10</sup>

In general, existentialism is understood as an attempt to emphasize the primacy of human existence as a marker of consciousness and meaning in life. Misnal Munir identified the following characteristics of existentialism. First, existence is about the unique way humans exist. Second, it entails making oneself active. Third, as human beings with an unfinished reality, individuals possess opportunities that are open to various possibilities. Fourth, existentialism values concrete experience. In Kierkegaard's perspective, existentialism is the pursuit of self-realization and embracing the uniqueness of one another according to personal choices by continually changing.<sup>11</sup>

Based on the problem described above, humans need to exist in their lives and embrace it dynamically, specifically in the current dilapidated era where individuals compete with each other.<sup>12</sup> Humans should base their lives on a value that does not interfere with their existence or violate other people. Humans shouldn't live cautiously while concealing their existence.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, it is also unfavorable to exist in this world while making others feel uncomfortable. Therefore, the

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<sup>9</sup> Armaidly Armawi, "Eksistensi Manusia dalam Filsafat Soren Kierkegaard," *Jurnal Filsafat* 21, no. 1 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.22146/jf.4738>.

<sup>10</sup> Ekawati, D. "Existentialism," *Tarbiyah* 12, no. 1 (2015): 137–153, <https://e-journal.metrouniv.ac.id/index.php/tarbawiyah/article/view/427>.

<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Webber, "What Is Existentialism? In J. Webber (Ed.), *Rethinking Existentialism*," Oxford University Press, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198735908.003.0001>; Jari Ristiniemi, "Existentialism. In A. L. C. Runehov & L. Oviedo (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Sciences and Religions*," Springer Netherlands, 2013, 818–825, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-8265-8\\_1601](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-8265-8_1601).

<sup>12</sup> Patric Plesa, "Reassessing Existential Constructs and Subjectivity: Freedom and Authenticity in Neoliberalism," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 00, no. 0 (2021): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002216782111032065>.

<sup>13</sup> Mark A. Michael, "Why Not Interfere with Nature? Ethical Theory and Moral Practice," *Springer* 5, no. 1 (2002): 89–112, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1023/A:1014494031814>; Erik Persson, "Synthetic Life and the Value of Life," *Frontiers in Bioengineering and Biotechnology* 9 (2021), <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fbioe.2021.701942>.

study experts aim to explore how to enjoy life in the Post-Truth Era by examining Soren Kierkegaard's existentialist thoughts.<sup>14</sup>

### **Soren Kierkegaard's Biographical Sketches and Intellectual Heritage**

Soren Aabye Kierkegaard (hereinafter referred to as Kierkegaard) was born in Copenhagen Denmark on May 5, 1813, and died in the same city on November 11, 1855, at the age of 42. Kierkegaard spent many years in Copenhagen, except for several trips to Berlin.<sup>15</sup> As a renowned philosopher and theologian of the 19<sup>th</sup> century AD, Kierkegaard was sometimes cynical, and a deep religious thinker. Kierkegaard was also famous for being rather strange a characteristic often mentioned in almost every biography encountered. It is intriguing to note that Kierkegaard disliked the Christian church but loved Christianity, which was a paradoxical aspect.<sup>16</sup>

Kierkegaard lived a long life without being shrouded by life's problems, such as fear, despair, anxiety, worry, bitterness, suffering, and health problems leading to the engagement termination with Regina Olsen, Kierkegaard might have discovered a brighter aspect of life, transcending the paradoxical experiences.<sup>17</sup>

Kierkegaard made a significant contribution to the development of world civilization by writing several books. A thorough examination of

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<sup>14</sup> Milla Titova & Kennon Sheldon, "Happiness Comes from Trying to Make Others Feel Good, Rather than Oneself," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 17 (2021): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2021.1897867>.

<sup>15</sup> Ondich J., *Soren Kierkegaard*, 2018, <https://mlpp.pressbooks.pub/introphil/chapter/soren-kirkegaard/>.

<sup>16</sup> David J Gouwens, "Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker," *Cambridge University Press*, 1996, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511520112>; Istvan Czakó, "Appropriation and Polemics: Karl Jaspers' Criticism of Kierkegaard's Concept of Religion. In B. M. Mezei & M. Z. Vale (Eds.), *Philosophies of Christianity: At the Crossroads of Contemporary Problems*," *Springer International Publishing*, 2019, 195–215, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-22632-9\\_11](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-22632-9_11).

<sup>17</sup> Jon Stewart, "Kierkegaard: A Transitional Figure from German Idealism to Existentialism. In J. Stewart (Ed.), *The Palgrave Handbook of German Idealism and Existentialism*," *Springer International Publishing*, 2020, 209–240, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-44571-3\\_9](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-44571-3_9).

Kierkegaard's intellectual heritage would yield a wealth of new knowledge. Kierkegaard's thought is a formula of never-ending musings, constantly thinking about the heart, soul, body, feelings, sadness, and fear. This introspection was Kierkegaard's problem. However, the paradox is that the exploration benefited the world, producing writings of high value to human civilization.<sup>18</sup>

Kierkegaard's intellectual heritage encompasses notable works, namely *On the Concept of Irony With Constant Regard to Socrates* (1841), *Etten-Eller* (1843), *Fear and Trembling* (1843), *Repetition* (1843), *Philosophical Crumbs* (1844), *The Concept of Anxiety* (1844), *Stages on the Road of Life* (1845), *Concluding Unscientific Postscript* (1846), *Edifying Discourses in Different Spirits* (1847), *Works of Love* (1847), *Christian Discourses* (1848), *The Sickness to Death* (1849), and *Indoctrination in Christianity* (1850).<sup>19</sup>

The works mentioned above are of high quality, perfection, and originality. However, Kierkegaard did not receive recognition from compatriots and had limited fame. It was only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century AD when the theologians began to explore the works, and after Carl Barth wrote a biography in the book "Epistle to the Romans," Kierkegaard's significance truly emerged<sup>20</sup>. In this case, it was observed that Kierkegaard's personality and lack of extensive travel contributed to her limited fame. However, Kierkegaard predicted to become famous after death, and indeed, the works are still studied today. Kierkegaard, as quoted by Fahrudin Faiz:

“What is needed today is not a genius, as there are enough geniuses. What is needed is a martyr, someone willing to be devoted to the point of death and teach people to remain steadfast until death. This age

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<sup>18</sup> Roger S. Gottlieb, “Kierkegaard’ Ethical Individualism,” *The Monist* 62, no. 3 (1979): 51–367, <https://doi.org/10.5840/monist197962324>.

<sup>19</sup> Rob Compaijen, “Kierkegaard on Being Human. In R. Compaijen (Ed.), Kierkegaard, MacIntyre, Williams, and the Internal Point of View,” *Springer International Publishing*, 2018, 89–155, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-74552-7\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-74552-7_4).

<sup>20</sup> T. Wilson Dickinson, “Repeating, Not Simply Recollecting, Repetition: On Kierkegaard’s Ethical Exercises,” *Sophia* 50, no. 4 (2011): 657–675, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11841-011-0259-z>.

requires a revival, and as a result, one day not only my writings but my entire life, with all its enigmatic questions will be scrutinized and studied. I will never forget how God has helped, therefore my last hope is that everything is for His glory".<sup>21</sup>

### Background of Soren Kierkegaard's Existentialism Thought

Several problems triggered the emergence of Kierkegaard's existentialist thought. These were summarized into 2, namely: *First*, Kierkegaard's personal life. Meanwhile, Kierkegaard never aspired to be known as the Father of Existentialism, Kierkegaard's way of being and thinking exemplifies the existentialist paradigm. Kierkegaard's spirit was shaped by a life filled with bitterness and suffering, fear and despair, anxieties and worries, dangers, as well as challenges. The breakup with Regina Olsen was a pivotal event that affected Kierkegaard, leaving a profound impact and creating a void. Health challenges were also a contributing factor.<sup>22</sup>

The turmoil caused by the broken engagement gave rise to a book, *Etten-Eller* (The One / The Other). Reading and comprehending this book can lead humans to the realization that true existence requires the courage to make transformative choices. Those who lack the audacity to make such choices are deemed to exist in the true sense (1843).<sup>23</sup>

The existence of a secret told by Kierkegaard's father gave rise to insurmountable depression and further reinforced the fact that Kierkegaard's life and work depict a struggle filled with deep despair.<sup>24</sup> These problems were always pondered by Kierkegaard and were the foundation for the never-ending musings. This ultimately gave birth to

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<sup>21</sup>Fahrudin Faiz, "Soren Kierkegaard" (2020), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wdXx5yPK1oA>.

<sup>22</sup> Compaijen, Rob. "Kierkegaard on Being Human. In R. Compaijen (ed.), Kierkegaard, MacIntyre, Williams, and the Internal Point of View." *Springer International Publishing*, 2018, 89–155. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-74552-7\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-74552-7_4).

<sup>23</sup> Gottlieb, Roger. S. "Kierkegaard' Ethical Individualism." *The Monist* 62, no. 3 (1979): 51–367. <https://doi.org/10.5840/monist197962324>.

<sup>24</sup> Stewart, "Kierkegaard: A Transitional Figure from German Idealism to Existentialism. In J. Stewart (ed.), *The Palgrave Handbook of German Idealism and Existentialism*."

works that are regarded as intellectual legacies of existentialism.<sup>25</sup>

*Second*, criticism of Hegel's abstractionism. Kierkegaard was initially a follower of Hegel but eventually turned away. In Kierkegaard's view, Hegel obscured the concrete meaning of life by asserting that human personal life is merely an element in the course of the development of ideas. Hegel's philosophy emphasized abstract concepts, diminishing the significance of individual experiences and relegating man from the position of a concrete person.<sup>26</sup> Hegel considered collective entities (people, the age of mankind, and the spirit of the world) to be more important and real than the individual in particular. Kierkegaard strongly criticized this perspective, asserting that the most crucial aspect of human life, at the first level, is precisely what concerns their own private life. This standpoint consequently gave birth to existentialist thinking.<sup>27</sup>

This study employed a qualitative design with a conceptual approach using three methods, namely exploratory, interpretative, and analytical<sup>28, 29</sup>. The exploratory method involves an accurate description of the existing data. The interpretative method delves into Soren Kierkegaard's thoughts to precisely extract their meaning and nuances. The analytical method

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<sup>25</sup> Czakó, "Appropriation and Polemics: Karl Jaspers' Criticism of Kierkegaard's Concept of Religion. In B. M. Mezei & M. Z. Vale (Eds.), *Philosophies of Christianity: At the Crossroads of Contemporary Problems*."

<sup>26</sup> Matthew Dinan, "Kierkegaard's Socratic Alternative to Hegel in Fear and Trembling," *The Review of Politics* 83, no. 3 (2021): 375–397, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034670521000115>; Patricia Leavy, *Research Design* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2017); Wayman Bernand, McLaughlin, "The Relation between Hegel and Kierkegaard," *Boston University*, 1958, <https://open.bu.edu/handle/2144/6219>.

<sup>27</sup> Dickinson, "Repeating, Not Simply Recollecting, Repetition: On Kierkegaard's Ethical Exercises."; Cook J.W, "Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein," *Religious Studies* 23, no. 2 (1987): 199–219, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412500018722>; Keren Hegel's *Introduction: Hegel's Concept of Life*. In K. Ng (ed.), *Hegel's Concept of Life: Self-Consciousness, Freedom, Logic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190947613.003.0001>.

<sup>28</sup> Lesley Eleanor, Tomaszewski, Zarestky, J., & Gonzalez, "Planning Qualitative Research: Design and Decision Making for New Researchers," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 19 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920967174>.

<sup>29</sup> Collins, C. S., & Stockton, "The Central Role of Theory in Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*" 17, no. 1 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406918797475>.



involves sorting and analyzing different meanings to obtain the desired data. The study was carried out in these steps: identifying all data sources, precisely describing the existing data, seeking the meaning of Kierkegaard's thoughts, and analyzing them.

The primary data source was Soren Kierkegaard's books and other works related to existential thinking. The selection of Soren Kierkegaard's character for studying existentialism goes beyond association with existentialism. Firstly, Soren Kierkegaard represents religious existentialism. Secondly, no study has analyzed Soren Kierkegaard's existentialism as one of the concepts for enjoying life.

### **Existentialism Perspective Soren Kierkegaard**

Kierkegaard emphasizes that humans need to freely choose their own lives and realize their freedom is distinct from others. Each person faces their own unique and distinctive problems. These existential problems are concrete issues that humans experience every day. The main existential issue is "How can I exist?" According to Kierkegaard, choosing one option eliminates all other possibilities. This necessitates a focus on goals and consistency while disregarding anything that might disrupt that focus.<sup>30</sup>

Kierkegaard argued that human existence is not static, but dynamic. This means that the existence/being of humans causes a transition from "possibility" to "reality". Making a change/movement/movement from things that were originally a mere possibility to reality is worth emphasizing. This is a free change that involves human choice. Simply put, Kierkegaard's view of human existence centers on the ability of individuals to transform possibilities into realities based on their own choices and actions.<sup>31</sup>

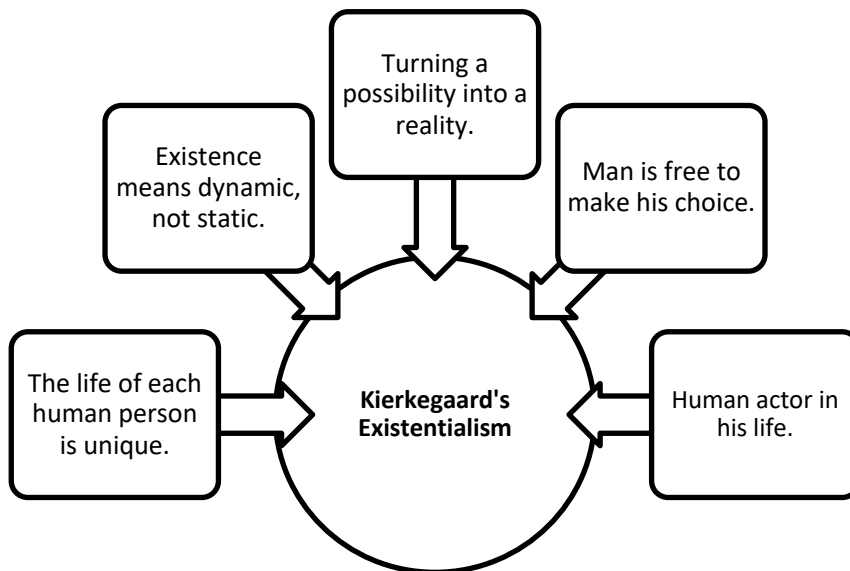
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<sup>30</sup> Parry Gardiner, "Freedom and the Self. In P. Gardiner," *Kierkegaard*, 2002, 108, <https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780192802569.003.0006>.

<sup>31</sup> An Assiter, "Kant and Kierkegaard on Freedom and Evil," *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements* 72 (2013): 275–296, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1358246113000155>.

Kierkegaard elucidated the essence of existence using an illustration cited by Höffken, like two individuals driving their chariot. The first coachman steered the horse while asleep, allowing the horse to move freely. Meanwhile, the second coachman was conscious and focused on controlling the horse. Kierkegaard suggests that both can be called coachmen, but only the second one truly embodies the role. Likewise, with humans, only those who become actors for their own lives truly exist. Individuals who merely drift in the crowd cannot be said to exist since they do not actively direct their own lives. In Kierkegaard's terms, the "I" is an "actor", a life actor who dares to make basic decisions for the direction of their own life, rather than a mere "spectator".<sup>32</sup>

Based on the description above, several characteristics highlighting the uniqueness of Kierkegaard's existentialism are illustrated in the following chart;



<sup>32</sup> Ole Höffken, "Mysticism of Experience, Faith in Communication: Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. In K. M. Pathak (ed.), *Quietism, Agnosticism, and Mysticism: Mapping the Philosophical Discourse of the East and the West*," Springer, 2021, 197–214, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-3223-5\\_11](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-3223-5_11).

## The Levels of Human Existence Based on the View of Soren Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard classifies human existence into 3 (three) distinct levels. First is aesthetic existence, where humans pay great attention to hedonism (living for temporary pleasures and satisfying desires), and live for limited purposes without concern for the future. At this level, human fear includes boredom, disappointment, and despair. The lack of restrictive moral standards and religious values grants humans the freedom to live by enjoying various emotional experiences and passions. The rise of boredom, disappointment, and despair at this level motivates humans to seek to get rid of these emotions. Despite their efforts, humans often struggle to find a pathway to progress to the next level.<sup>33</sup>

*Second*, is ethical existence, where humans live by their choices, commitments, and responsibilities based on moral values. The human challenge at this level is their weaknesses, and their belief in moral values empowers them to overcome these challenges. Although humans believe in moral power and their ability to solve life problems, they do not know the ultimate purpose of their ethical actions, prompting their desire to rise to a higher level. Kierkegaard exemplifies an individual at this level, akin to Socrates, who sacrificed life for the sake of moral values.<sup>34</sup>

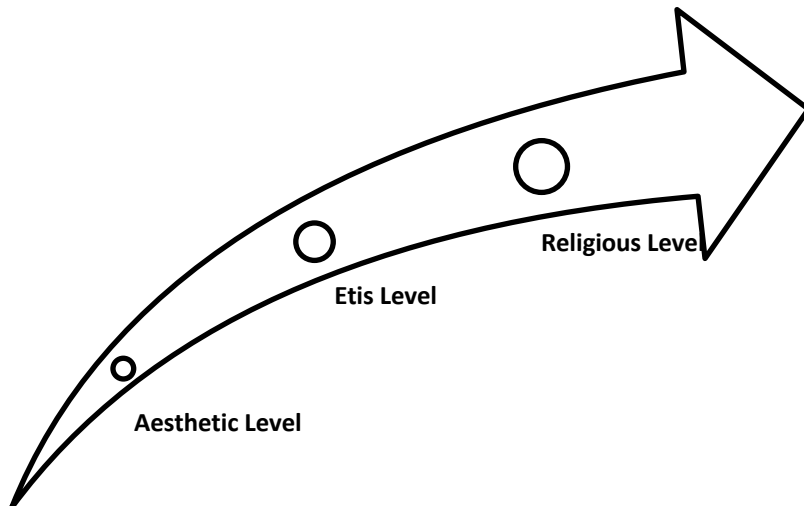
*Third* is religious existence, where the individuals acknowledge God, and recognize themselves as sinners who need God's forgiveness. Those at this level are committed to taking a leap of faith, namely repentance. Individuals who choose this level of religious existence have the consequence of embracing the courage to accept the subjectivity of God's transcendence. They also commit themselves to following God's way and

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<sup>33</sup> Roe Fremstedal, "Demonic Despair under the Guise of the Good? Kierkegaard and Anscombe vs. Velleman," *Inquiry* 66, no. 5 (2023): 705–725, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0020174X.2019.1610047>.

<sup>34</sup>Petr Vaškovic, "A Path to Authenticity: Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky on Existential Transformation," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 87, no. 1 (2020): 81–108, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11153-019-09732-z>.

are free from universal human values as well as personal or societal demands. Abraham, who demonstrated faith in God by willingly sacrificing their son, Isaac, serves as an exemplary figure at this level.<sup>35</sup>



In Kierkegaard's view, this is a level of religious existence that makes him the character of theistic existentialism, an existentialism based on God's values. Kierkegaard, as quoted by Mahmudah, states, "Humans are not only individuals in front of themselves, but also individuals in front of their God" This means that humans within the circle of their earthly lives find the purpose of their existence. Beyond harnessing their intellectual potential, the crucial aspect lies in establishing a relationship with God, the giver of grace for their existence.<sup>36</sup>

Kierkegaard's philosophy has been a major influence on post-modernist thinking; he is often labeled as the Father of Existentialism. Kierkegaard wrote his thoughts for and to that person, who with joy and gratitude, I call my reader.<sup>37</sup> He became an opposition to the branches of

<sup>35</sup> Jeffrey Hanson, "Despair as a Threat to Meaning: Kierkegaard's Challenge to Objectivist Theories," *Philosophies* 6, no. 4 (2021): 4, <https://doi.org/10.3390/philosophies6040092>.

<sup>36</sup> Mahmudah, M. "Filsafat Eksistensialisme: Telaah Ajaran dan Relevansinya dengan Tujuan Pendidikan di Indonesia." *INSANIA: Jurnal Pemikiran Alternatif Kependidikan* 14, no. 3 (1970): 336–447. <https://doi.org/10.24090/insania.v14i3.357>.

<sup>37</sup> Rahkman Ardi et al., "Religious Schema and Tolerance towards Alienated Groups in Indonesia," *Heliyon* 7, no. 7 (2021): 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e07603>.

thought that were the norm at that time, regarding philosophy, religious dogma, and divinity. First of all, we must establish that Soren Kierkegaard was an outspoken critic of the church. Not to the Christian religion itself, not to its adherents, but to the church which is closely tied to the country (established church). When he lay dying waiting to die after being found unconscious on the road and being hospitalized, he refused to be visited by his relative, Peter Christian Kierkegaard, a priest, who he said was a representative of the church.

When asked whether he would receive Holy Communion (Eucharist) in his later days he responded "Yes, but from a layman, not from a priest", and when told that it would be difficult to provide it, Kierkegaard responded that he would die without it". He defended his stance by explaining that "Pastors are civil servants (of) the king – they have nothing to do with Christianity" A theme that continues to be repeated and becomes the main language in Kierkegaard's thinking is the concept of overcoming angst and anxiety. His book, *The Concept of Anxiety* was published on 17 June 1844. Contents of his writings. Kierkegaard lived in anxiety long before and after the publication of this novel. Thomte, in his introduction to his translation of *The Concept of Anxiety*.<sup>38</sup> Quotes Kierkegaard from his diary, saying "Fragile innocent souls can easily be tempted to believe that they are guilty".

But it is clear that Kierkegaard thought that anxiety was not merely a presentiment and more of a pervasiveness in life itself; is part of every human being. Kierkegaard wrote, "In every human being there still lives the anxiety over the possibility of being alone in the world, abandoned by God, ignored by millions and millions (of souls) in this large household". Kierkegaard, through his pen name Vigilius Haufniensis, explores this concept of anxiety by describing it as "unfocused fear". He uses the example of a young man standing on the edge of a large building. From this height, there are all possibilities; to live or to die. The young man could

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<sup>38</sup> Michael Laffan, *The Makings of Indonesian Islam: Orientalism and the Narration of a Sufi Past* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011).

have thrown himself to the bottom and ended it there. At that edge, he could have decided for himself, and only himself, to jump. From the fact that there is no one or anything in the world that can stop him or make him jump, there is a feeling that his life is in his own hands. That power feels sickening. And we all have felt this feeling of anxiety. In the novel *The Concept of Anxiety*, it is written:

“Anxiety can be compared to nausea. He whose unplanned eyes looked down into the gaping dark hole felt nauseous. But what is the reason? What is in his eyes is the same as what is in that dark hole, if for example, he does not look down? Anxiety is a feeling of nausea from freedom, which arises when the soul wants to put its synthesis and freedom to look down on perhaps he, holding onto his mortality to support himself. Freedom succumbs to this nausea. Beyond this, psychology (the self) cannot and will not let it go. At that moment everything changed and freedom, when he appeared again, saw that he was guilty. Between the two moments, there is a leap, which no science has explained or can explain. He who is guilty of anxiety is confused and becomes as guilty as possible. Anxiety is a feminine weakness in which the sense of independence falls into a swoon”.

We already know the concept of truth as something that has never been discussed by existentialists. For Kierkegaard, truth is about objectivity and subjectivity. Under the pen name Johannes Climacus, Kierkegaard wrote the article "Subjectivity is truth". To interpret it, we must read the truth that is near us, not as a permanent truth or something absolute, but as something subjective. If we reflect on the tasks and work of scholars and historians, for example, our description of them is that they are involved in objective matters; something Of course, they study nature and historical writings and from there they predict what will happen in the future. Climacus (Kierkegaard) did not ignore the importance of science, but he wrote that the results of science itself change when the equipment of observation is changed. This is what is called subjective truth.

He demonstrated this rhetoric to those who believed that by understanding science and history, they recognized the absolute existence of human truth. For Kierkegaard, moreover, 'self' is also a subjectivity;

Truth is an individual's possession. Wrote, "Subjectivity" (Subjektivitet) suggests something in contrast to interests, behavior, and compulsions, namely character-formation) which is associated with speculative philosophical activities and reliable historical expertise. Climacus calls it the creation of the character of "objectivity". "Inwardness/Inderlighed" often implies a different contrast - with "externalities" such as social roles, reputation, the "results" of one's attitudes, and natural phenomena seen by the public.

If truth belongs to individuals (each), then it must be defined as what a person is. In Kierkegaard's frame of mind, an individual is defined in contrast to its "opposition" to life which is oriented towards and with the crowd. To be a person is to obtain rights and use these rights to act without a sense of social dependence, namely to not subject oneself to the acceptance and rejection of one's peers and become emotionally enslaved to them.<sup>39</sup> Many experts divide the complexity of Kierkegaard's writings into 3 levels of human existence. Although naming these 3 levels cannot represent all of Kierkegaard's works, this method has become a well-known method for introducing the thoughts of this Danish writer. This theory of division is well known in American academic circles, if existence can be divided into parts (1) aesthetic existence (aesthetic) (2) ethical (ethical), (3) religious.

It is understood that people located in the upper existence can also feel/perform the existence below. For example, a religious person (in a very pure sense; as interpreted by Kierkegaard) can experience aesthetic enjoyment as well as ethical duties. The differences between these 3 stages are not visible from the outside but are experienced by him internally.

Kierkegaard defined many aspects of aesthetics in his writings. One of them describes it as a life defined by intellectual pleasure, sensual passion, and a tendency to present oneself as if "on a stage." But of course, this process is not just a superficial measure. (In this phase) someone can

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<sup>39</sup> Gerald Zaltman and Robert Duncan, *Strategies for Planned Change. A Wiley-Interscience Publication John Wiley and Sons* (New York: London, Sydney, Toronto, 1997).

live their life without even self-reflection, or someone can live their life with independence, critical thinking, and the intention to live for themselves. Kierkegaard describes this process as a very unreflective (critical) process but of course, does not blame him.

In *Either/Or Part II* Kierkegaard describes: You love that which is accidental. The smile of a beautiful woman in an attractive situation, stolen thoughts, that's what you're looking for, that's the motive of your undirected fantasy. Those of you who pride yourself as an observer must instead accept to be the object of observation. Ah, you are a strange individual, one time you are a child, another time you are an old man; One moment you are thinking seriously about a scientific problem, how you will devote your life to it, and the next you are a stupid lovesick person. But you still have a long way to go from marriage. The second level of existence is the ethical level. This is the level at which humans begin to discover/take direction of their true purpose in life; and become aware of their responsibility for the good, the bad, and the benefits they can provide to those around them.

A person's actions and behavior at this level have qualities that he did not have at the previous level. He converted himself to return to himself, return to his family, and return to (his) competition until he created himself in God. Only in this state can he sort himself out, because only in this method can he truly sort himself out”.<sup>40</sup>

Through the pseudonym Judge Wilhelm, Kierkegaard expresses ethical existence as a commitment and responsibility that must be selected in each person's understanding. The meaning of a person's life for Wilhelm depends on how he is responsible for his choices. what he makes in the present his choices in the future, and how he becomes the owner of the choices he has made previously. People who are at an ethical level are responsible for their choices in the past - the good ones and the bad ones

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<sup>40</sup> Cook, J. W. “Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein.” *Religious Studies* 23, no. 2 (1987): 199–219. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412500018722>.



uphold self-consistency, and his dedication to a devoted and passionate way of life; to dedicate himself to his duties. But it is clear that for Kierkegaard, being ethical is not the same as being "good," in *Either/Or* Part II he explains.

I just want to bring you to the point where this choice (between good and evil) has meaning for you. Instead of referring to the choice between good and evil, *Either/Or* I refer to the option where a person chooses between good and evil or crosses it out at all. Here the question is on what basis a person views the totality of existence and life for himself. Ethical and religious existence are closely tied to each other: a person can be ethical without being religious. But the religious level of existence has ethical devotion. Whereas life in the ethical realm requires a commitment to moral absolutes, life in the religious realm requires a commitment and bond to the Christian God. In this case, a person devotes himself not only to his duties but then goes beyond them and dedicates himself to a power that lies beyond his existence; a power that he cannot fully comprehend.

It is a universal description that Soren Kierkegaard is "The Father of Existentialism"; as a source of influence from the thoughts of Heidegger, Sartre, Foucault to Camus. However, some academics interpret Kierkegaard's works as a continuation of ideas that existed earlier. Robert C. Roberts, in the essay *Existence, emotion, and Virtue: Classical Themes in Kierkegaard*, for example, said that I would read Kierkegaard more as a successor to Kierkegaard. Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas became the predecessors of Sartre and Foucault. In this reading, "subjectivity" and "existence" will provoke thinking about personality rather than subjectivism and radical options". Then Roberts quotes Kierkegaard, through the pseudonym Johannes Climacus, that his generation has forgotten what it means to exist and what the meaning of spirituality is."

Many philosophers of the 20th century, with a theistic approach or the opposite, took inspiration from Kierkegaard's thinking. One of them is overriding the concepts of anxiety, despair, and the meaning of individuality. Kierkegaard established his popularity as a philosopher

approximately a century after he died. He continued to become known after the decades of the world wars, especially due to the emergence of post-war existentialist thinkers. To count the following philosophers who were involved in Kierkegaard's thinking: Martin Heidegger, Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Niels Bohr, Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel, Reinhold Niebuhr, Franz Rosenzweig, Franz Kafka, and many more Again.

### **Enjoying Life in the Post-Truth Era Existentialism Perspective of Soren Kierkegaard**

Avoiding or erasing the reality of the development of the current era is impossible. Just like trying to hold back the flow of water from high to low, it cannot be stopped. Although dealing with this reality can be challenging, it can lead to positive outcomes when approached wisely.<sup>41</sup> There are also risks to be faced when mistakes are made. Humans are currently entering an era where personal opinion overrides objective facts, giving rise to hoaxes, SARA issues, fake news, and hate speech, a phenomenon known as the Post-Truth era.<sup>42</sup>

In this era, humans no longer lack information, instead, there is an excess of it, or what is known as "information spill." This abundance of information can cause disorientation or confusion. Humans can also lose the depth of thought, giving rise to a new generation of internet users.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Forsyth, A., & Richard, Peiser, "Lessons from Planned Resettlement and New Town Experiences for Avoiding Climate Sprawl," *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 2021, 205, doi:103957. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2020.103957>.

<sup>42</sup> Higham, Helen., & Vincent, "Human Error and Patient Safety. in L. Donaldson, W. Ricciardi, S. Sheridan, & R. Tartaglia (ed.), *Textbook of Patient Safety and Clinical Risk Management*," *Springer International Publishing*, 2021, 29–44, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-59403-9\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-59403-9_3).

<sup>43</sup> Jeroen Van den Hoven, Blaauw, M., Pieters, W., & Warnier, "Privacy and Information Technology. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*," *Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University*, 2020, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2020/entries/it-privacy/>; Peter Gordon, Roetzel, "Information Overload in the Information Age: A Review of the Literature from Business Administration, Business Psychology, and Relproach and Framework Developmated Disciplines with a Bibliometric Apent," *Business Research* 12, no. 2 (2019): 479–522, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40685-018-0069-z>.

These individuals are described by Nicholas Carr as “Shallows” (The Shallows), who are used to consuming instant information without thinking deeply. Kierkegaard warned against the meaninglessness that arises in the era of scientific and technological progress, as humans are vulnerable to deception and manipulation.<sup>44</sup>

The problem lies not in the presence of valid and informative information circulating on the internet, specifically on social media, but when hoax information, fake news, hate speech, and other negative connotations are accepted as raw and disseminated easily with 'one-click'.<sup>45</sup> This poses a problem for all of humanity. Such propagation, which is SARA in nature, can trigger the emergence of feelings of suspicion, hatred, and sentiment toward people of different ethnicities, cultures, races, and religions. This consequently undermines the stability of universal values, namely unity, justice, and equality, echoed by all religions.<sup>46</sup>

Amidst the massive hoax news in this Post-Truth Era, specifically those related to SARA issues that spark public sentiment and have implications for disrupting the stability of universal values as previously explained, How can humans enjoy life? How can humans prevent themselves from being easily ignited by the fire of anger, which is likely to give birth to new hoaxes? Kierkegaard's existentialist thought highlights several values that humans can implement to enjoy a good and useful life in this post-truth era amidst these challenges. Among these values are, *First*, being oneself. This theory is central and has been the main characteristic of Kierkegaard's existentialist view. It has become a philosophy of life that is always relevant to the times. Being oneself is the

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<sup>44</sup> Compaijen, “Kierkegaard on Being Human. In R. Compaijen (Ed.), Kierkegaard, MacIntyre, Williams, and the Internal Point of View.”

<sup>45</sup> Tsfiati, Yariv., Boomgaarden, H. G., Strömbäck, J., Vliegthart, R., Damstra, A., & Lindgren, “Causes and Consequences of Mainstream Media Dissemination of Fake News: Literature Review and Synthesis,” *Annals of the International Communication Association* 44, no. 2 (2020): 157–173, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2020.1759443>.

<sup>46</sup>Pérez-Escoda A and C Pedrero-Esteban, L. M., Rubio-Romero, J., & Jiménez-Narros, “Fake News Reaching Young People on Social Networks: Distrust Challenging Media Literacy,” *Publications* 9, no. 2 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.3390/publications9020024>.

most important thing in life. It can be related to how each human becomes a voter who is given the freedom to determine their life, including the choice to live without conforming to someone else who may not be in line with the mind and narrative of the heart.<sup>47</sup>

*Second*, being moral. Based on Kierkegaard's belief as a Lutheran Christian, the influence of theology can be seen from Kierkegaard's perspective on ethics. Kierkegaard's analysis suggests that actions should comply with universal rules. In this regard, Kierkegaard emphasizes that ethics transcends the notions of moral or immoral, as these can only be known through intuition. This does not mean denying the ability of the mind or cognition to know.<sup>48</sup> Rather, when making decisions related to human life, one should look into God's teachings. In Kierkegaard's perspective, humans possess morality or ethics based on universal rules and cannot pass judgment on what is good or bad, right or wrong, as this realm solely belongs to God. Therefore, humans are subjects that carry out ethics but are not objects to be judged.<sup>49</sup>

Becoming a morally upright human in the Post-Truth era, as described in Kierkegaard's thoughts above, enables humans to overcome the challenges they face. For example, when receiving doubtful information regarding SARA issues, individuals should adhere to general rules for handling doubtful information. One such guideline is to prioritize *Tabayyun* first. Information can be shared after conducting *tabayyun* and confirming its validity. However, they are forbidden when they are hoaxes or false. Moral humans are aware of the consequences of disseminating misleading information, and therefore, exercise caution in sharing such

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<sup>47</sup> Compaijen, "Kierkegaard on Being Human. In R. Compaijen (Ed.), Kierkegaard, MacIntyre, Williams, and the Internal Point of View."; Sachdeva, Sonya., Iliev, R., Ekhtiari, H., & Dehghani, "The Role of Self-Sacrifice in Moral Dilemmas," *PLOS ONE* 10, no. 6 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0127409>.

<sup>48</sup> Gouwens, "Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker". <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511520112>.

<sup>49</sup> Ondich, *Soren Kierkegaard*, <https://mlpp.pressbooks.pub/introphil/chapter/soren-kirkegaard/>.

content with their friends.<sup>50</sup>

Third is living a religious life. Kierkegaard as quoted by Mariam Rawan Abdulla stated that:

“Religious man, in practicing his religion is directly connected to God, and not to mere concepts about God. To be a true Christian, one needs to be critical of the systems of thought that have objectivated Christianity, as religion is fundamentally subjective. Kierkegaard criticized efforts to create a systematized Christianity, known as Christendom or a form of Christian objectivism. Such can limit the existence of a Christian by denying them the option of being "other" than the general tendency of Christian action.”<sup>51</sup>

There are two important keywords from the discussion above. First, connecting oneself directly to God, and total surrendering not to the concepts about God. In a sense, certain concepts about God, borne out of human creation/imagination, can yield positive outcomes. On the contrary, they can give rise to negative consequences, that should be discarded. *Second*, it is crucial to recognize that God cannot will evil upon human liberty. Religious teachings that harm and restrict human freedom are not completely religious teachings but rather stem from human interference or the existence of religious authoritarianism.

Based on the above discussion, regarding the values of existentialism in Kierkegaard's thought, humans can incorporate these principles into their daily lives, and enjoy life in this Post-Truth Era. Therefore, the integrity of the universal values echoed by all religions will be maintained. This, in turn, can foster an Earthly atmosphere of peace and tranquility among religious adherents who respect each other and refrain from getting emotionally caught up in the current dissemination of information.

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<sup>50</sup> Tsfati, Yariv., Boomgaarden, H. G., Strömbäck, J., Vliegenthart, R., Damstra, A., & Lindgren, “Causes and Consequences of Mainstream Media Dissemination of Fake News: Literature Review and Synthesis.”; Guess, Andrew M., & Lyons, “Misinformation, Disinformation, and Online Propaganda,” *Social Media and Democracy*, 2020, 10–33, <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108890960.003>.

<sup>51</sup> Miftahur Rohman, Sulthan Syahril, and Dini Fauziyati, “Masa Depan Studi Islam Di Pendidikan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam (Sebuah Tinjauan Filosofis-Yuridis),” *Cendekia: Jurnal Kependidikan Dan Kemasyarakatan* 16, no. 2 (2018): 283.

## Conclusion

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that the means of enjoying life in the Post-Truth Era is based on Soren Kierkegaard's existentialist values. These values are as follows: First is being oneself. This involves living life according to the narrative of the heart and mind, letting go of everything as well, and embracing the goodness and usefulness of life. Moreover, one should have self-confidence in one's abilities, and realize that life should be lived with or without the help of others by avoiding dependency on others.

The second is being moral. Moral human beings are individuals who live life according to a set of rules that are in line with their minds and do not restrain them. The existence of these rules makes one realize that life is about choosing the good and leaving the bad. Third is living a religious life. It is not enough to be moral, as humans need to draw closer to God directly, and not concepts about God. Therefore, religious persons must be critical to avoid being caught up by religious misunderstandings.

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