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### Existentialist Notes

J. Clay Smith Jr.

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## Open Forum

# Existentialist Notes

by J. Clay Smith, Jr.

Published in Hilltop (Howard Univ. student newspaper) circa Fall 1967

Existentialism is a philosophy of existence. As a philosophy, it is a modern concept, its deepest roots are in Europe, but its influence is steadily spreading into all of the sciences, into all parts of the world.

Man is the subject and the predicate of this philosophy. The existentialists are not all in agreement as to what existentialism means; however, they do agree that it concerns itself with man's achievement of himself.

For Hegel, reason has within itself two tendencies, a tendency to affirm itself and a tendency to deny itself. From this opposition there results a reconciliation which is called a synthesis.

Man's self-consciousness becomes one of affirmation, denial and results in a synthesis. Synthesis is the point that man comes nearest to truth and reality. Man's spirit achieves reality; society, in order to become perfect must also affirm and deny. By this process of affirmation and denial, reason and society evolve. The following observations can be made:

1. The Universe is one of evolution and of constant development.
2. The aim and object of man's Spirit and Reason is to reach Self-Perfection and Self-Consciousness.
3. The end of history is to reach the stage of Perfection and Self-Consciousness.
4. The unfolding of the Universe is achieved through a

process of affirmation and denial.

5. Man in Society becomes Perfect, Conscious, Philosophic when he achieves his highest development through a rational process.

6. Man is identified with reason.

7. Man attains the universal through concepts and abstractions.

For the existentialists, the rationalist's philosophy draws on reason and totally ignores the individual; it is like a cookbook given to a hungry man. The existentialists concern themselves with that things are while Hegel views reality from what things are. While Hegel concerns himself with essence, the existentialists do not concern themselves with essence or at least with the problem of does existence come before essence or does essence come before existence.

To exist is to be complete. To be complete is to be authentic. The existentialist seeks complete as opposed to incomplete existence. Any incomplete existence is a false, counterfeit of self. Authentic existence is something achieved by man's own choice which may be illogical and is much more than an affirmation, denial and synthesis. When man chooses the kind of self that he wishes to be, man chooses complete-authentic-existence. How is this authenticity achieved? For the religious existentialist it is achieved by faith.