

Existential Anguish and Its Influence on Personal Growth

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Abstract : This paper seeks to study the concept of existential anguish and its relation to personal growth. Generally, existential anguish is taken to be an all-pervading negative feeling arising from an individual's knowledge of their absolute freedom. However, this paper investigates the possible positive impact of this sense of anguish, such as its role in commencing an individual's journey towards authentic living, characterized by an internal locus of will, and acceptance of absolute freedom. This journey towards authentic living is what is referred to as personal growth, in this paper, in the context of existential philosophy. The work of four prominent existentialists has been used to elucidate existential anguish. A human's scope for personal growth in the existential framework has been compared to that in the teleological framework of religion. In the latter, individuals must abide by the moral code of an external authority and work towards a pre-ordained purpose of life. This is illustrated by the examination of Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam. To test people's levels of existential anguish, religiosity, and personal growth, a survey using an originally constructed questionnaire has been undertaken. Simple and partial correlation analyses have been used to ascertain the relationships between these three variables. Contrary to the hypothesis, the results indicate that existential anguish has a detrimental effect on personal growth, while religiosity does not affect it at all. Through their responses, it was also evident that the respondents do not adhere to teleological concepts of morality, despite a belief in God. This study has further scope in determining how variations in sample demography may influence the relationship of existential anguish with personal growth.

Keywords : existential anguish, existentialism, personal growth, religiosity, teleology

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