FOUNDATIONALISM AND PROCESS-ETHICS: A HERMENEUTICAL JUSTIFICATION OF WHITEHEAD'S PROCESS THOUGHT

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ABSTRACT: *Ours is a universe bedeviled by ethical controversies. Wonder, led philosophy through many ages, leading it to metamorphose into, in most cases, irreconcilable tenets, leaving the quest for certainty of knowledge or foundationalism groan in the dark. Process philosophy turns out as veritable option in the faces of yet the uncertainties of the 'certainties 'of previous ethical thoughts. The principle of Process Ethics is applied to a current ethical controversy: gay-marriage. This brings to lime-light, the tolerance that should prevail in those countries that tenaciously stick to a previously given ethical norms.*

KEY WORDS: Process Thought; Process Ethics; Foundationalism; Gay–Marriage.

INTRODUCTION

Our conception about ourselves and the world we live in has enormous impact on our actions and reactions to events and situations that present themselves before us. Ideas rule the world and inadvertently shape our actions. It definitely matters how we think about ourselves, the world and reality.

Philosophy started with wonder; a quest to develop a coherent concept of the world that summarizes reality and simplifies our experiences. In this quest, Thales of Miletus saw 'water' as the summary (called 'stuff') of reality. For him, reality is water as every aspect of it; liquid, solid and gas can be identified in water. Anaximander and Anaximenes reflecting on the same issue saw reality as comprising of boundless realm and air respectively. Their conclusions about reality is not as important as the fact that they brought to light an opinion that the diversities in reality can be explained if a single concept that underlies them is identified.

Today, the development of science has brought the world into a unified whole. More awareness of the variance in cultures, religion, beliefs, race etc is now being created more than ever before. There are increased interactions among nations of diverse cultural and religious beliefs. These interactions have consequently brought to bare, the depth of the discrepancy and consequently the tumults and clashes that accompany such awareness. As a result of this, there increases in the world order, consciously or unconsciously, a tension whose root can be found in the attempt to assert the supremacy or at least, the relevance of one's own conception of reality. The Second World War for example was seen as a war of ideologies (Huntington 2003, p.52). Most moral disputes witnessed in our present dispensation allude to the awareness of the divergences and the consequent attempt to assert the relevance of one's view point. Issues of abortion, same-sex marriage, euthanasia, capital punishment etc continue to raise dusts whenever they are raised for debates. The attempt to insist on one's ideology sometimes leads to more confrontations that could develop into clashes and wars. The debate on same-sex marriage seems to be the most prevalent moral issue today.

The prevalence and continuous progression of these conflicts has necessitated more than ever, a comprehensive vision of reality that would pull the many divergences and conversations together into a meaningful unified whole. This is what this paper attempts to achieve in a philosophical manner. Process philosophy inspired principally by Alfred North Whitehead appears to be a veritable tool of interpretation of reality which would address the present moral conflicts in the world. Process ethics, an extension of Process philosophy sees reality as a 'process' and is presented in this paper as a speculative endeavour and a panacea that would provide a unifying vision of interpretation of reality. This notion of interpretation implies that whatever aspect of our reality 'inserted' into this system, like the litmus test paper, would show itself as aligning to the system in a necessary, coherent and logical manner.

Rationalism is an adventure in the clarification of thought, progressive and never final (Whitehead 1985, p. 9). This adventure is always an experimental one, building itself through constructive criticisms. In this rational adventure for a unified system of reality, gay marriage is presented as an experiment to test the foundation of the system called Process. Gay marriage is interpreted in the light of Process-thought and when this is done, actions and reactions that should accompany such debates would become obvious.

Foundationalism

Foundationalism is an epistemological theory which holds that basic beliefs which form the foundation for other justified beliefs exist. Some beliefs are justified only because some other beliefs which are more fundamental justify them. Basic beliefs provide a foundation for epistemic justification. According to Pollock and Cruz, "basic beliefs do not require the justification of reason as this would imply that they are no more basic since they are being justified by something external to it. Thus, for basic beliefs to provide a foundation, they must have secure epistemic status". (1999, p. 35).

The theory of foundationalism rests on the assumption that beliefs must be justified by other beliefs. This assumption when implemented in epistemology creates an infinite regress problem as each justified belief must itself be justified by another and so on. Foundationalism therefore attempts to avoid this problem by positing basic beliefs which can justify other beliefs but do not need to be justified themselves and so serve as foundations of knowledge.

The history of foundationalism is indeed a long one. Aristotle opines that finding an alternative to foundationalism must land us either in circular reasoning or in an infinite regress reasoning. In order not to land in the aforementioned which is not plausible, foundationalism is preferred. The infinite regress problem was prominent in the writings of the academic skeptics, especially Sextus Empiricus's *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* and Diogenes Laertius "The Life of Pyrrho" in his book, *The Lives and Options of Eminent Philosophers.* However, some foundationalists differ from others in their nature and mode of operation. Thus one can say that there are primary and secondary forms of foundationalism otherwise called infallible and fallible foundationalism respectively.

Fallible foundationalism, ipso facto, is weaker in content than the infallible foundationalism. Thomas Reid asserts that "fallible foundational beliefs are beliefs of common sense, which have a right of ancient possession and until this inherent right is successfully challenged, they remain justified without support from any other belief" (1960, p. 67). It is called fallible as it serves as a fallible guide to the truth rather than a guarantee of truth.

Descartes is the most well known foundationalist who takes as foundation, the allegedly indubitable knowledge of his own existence and the content of his ideas. He then made every other justified belief to be grounded ultimately in this knowledge.

Types of Foundationalist Views

As remarked above, foundationalists differ from each other in their nature and mode of operation. In a nutshell, foundationalism shall be grouped into two theories: theories of non-inferential justification and theories of inferential justification. The former can be grouped under three views: Strong, Modest and Weak foundationalism while the later can be grouped under three views as well: Deductivism, Strict inductivism and Liberal inductivism.

Strong Foundationalism

Strong foundationalists hold that the properly basic beliefs are infallible, indubitable or incorrigible. Infallible beliefs are not possibly false. Indubitable beliefs are not possible to doubt even though the content may be false, and incorrigible beliefs cannot be undermined by further information.

Descartes is a strong proponent of strong foundationalism. His position on strong foundationalism can be found in his method of doubt which gave rise to 'Cogito ergo sum' which is self-evident and prima facie guarantees its own existence and proves other things around it. Descartes aimed to locate secure foundations for knowledge and dismissed any claims that were fallible, dubitable or corrigible. Thus, Descartes sought the foundations of knowledge in restricted mental states. Another argument for strong foundationalism is C.I Lewis's contention that probability must be grounded in certainty (1952, pp.168-175). The most widespread argument for strong foundationalism is the need for philosophical assurance concerning the truth of one's beliefs which will be located in foundations that are immune from doubt.

Modest Foundationalism

William Alston, C.F. Delaney and Mark Pastin are proponents of modest foundationalism. They proposed modest foundationalism as the qualities of strong foundationalism: infallible, incorrigible or indubitable came under serious attack. They argued that foundationalist epistemology merely required that the basic beliefs have a level of positive epistemic status independent of warranting relations from other beliefs. In the light of this weaker form of foundationalism, the attack on the qualities of strong foundationalism did not touch the core of a foundationalist epistemology.

Modest foundationalism claims that the basic beliefs possess knowledge adequate justification even when the beliefs may not have the qualities of infallibility, incorrigibility or indubitability. So in modest foundationalism, knowledge rests on a foundation of propositions whose positive epistemic status is sufficient to infer other beliefs but whose positive status may be undermined by further information. Critics to modest foundationalism like Timothy McGrew have argued that once the alleged foundations are merely probable, then they are really no foundations at all as all empirical knowledge must be grounded in certainties (2003, pp. 194-206).

Weak Foundationalism

Laurence BonJour is a major proponent of weak foundationalism. Weak foundationalists hold that coherence among one's beliefs is what is required for knowledge- adequate justification and also for one's beliefs to function as premises for other beliefs. Thus, coherence has an ineliminable role for knowledge and inference. However, critics to weak foundationalism like James Van Cleve contend that weak foundationalism's reliance on coherence is inadequate to generate justification for one's belief. (2005, pp. 168-180).

Theories of Inferential Justification

This is an examination of the nature of the inferential relations between basic beliefs and non-basic beliefs. It is the foundationalist's claim that all non-basic beliefs are justified by the basic beliefs. Theories of inferential justification then set out how this works and the proper conditions for the justification of non-basic beliefs. For this, three approaches emerge: deductivism, strict inductivism and liberal inductivism.

Deductivism holds that proper knowledge consists in the constriction of deductively valid arguments whose premises are indubitable or self-evident. Descartes' epistemology is often aligned with deductivism. Deductivism is criticized as implausible as it requires strong foundationalism whose premises must be infallible, indubitable or incorrigible.

Strict inductivism came up to cushion the criticisms to deductivism. It allows the basic premises to include knowledge of general truths and beliefs about the external world or the past. Strict inductivism is motivated by the thought that we have some kind of inferential knowledge of the world that cannot be accommodated by deductive inference from epistemically basic beliefs.

As debates arose over the merits of strict inductivism, liberal inductivism became an alternative. Liberal inductivism is any view that accepts the legitimacy of a form of inference of the best explanation. The criteria used to evaluate explanations to determine the best include: simplicity, testability, scope, fruitfulness and conservativeness. Simplicity looks at how many properties or laws the explanation postulates and testability is a matter of its ability to be determined to be true or false. The scope is how much data the hypothesis covers and the fruitfulness is how well it can be implemented for new research project. Finally, conservativeness looks at how it fits to our previously accepted beliefs.

Whatever be the case, foundationalism, given the continued interest in the regress problem proves to be of perennial interest.

Process Ethics

The philosophy of Whitehead is the philosophy of process. The process thought asserts that there are no fundamental "things" or "objects" in the world. The universe contains only processes. Like the "Omnia flux" of Heraclitus, Whitehead's reality consist of generation and corruption; becoming and perishing. Unlike science that created atoms, electrons, gravity, etc, and unlike Aristotle that created substance, Whitehead's process thought foils these dogmatic ideas. Everything is in process including our thoughts and God.

Atoms were taken to be the smallest unit of an element that can take part in a chemical change. Each of Whitehead's atoms called 'actual entity' or 'actual occasion' is an organism that grows,

matures and perishes. Whitehead gave a clear description of actual entities in his book, *Process and Reality*. For him, " 'actual entities' – also termed 'actual occasions' – are the final real things of which the world is made up. There is no going behind actual entities to find anything more real" (1985, p. 18).

The minutest beginning of reality is to be found in actual entity. This actual entity is distinguished from Leibniz's monads and also from Democritus' and Epicurus' atoms. Democritus' atoms are irreducible bits of matter. They are lifeless and would have to get its motion from something outside itself. Leibniz's monads which he termed the 'true atoms of nature' are forces or energy, capable of actions which include change. But the actual entity of Whitehead is conceived as an act of experience, complex and interdependent. It merely becomes. It is a process "…and is not describable in terms of the morphology of a 'stuff'" (Sherburne 1981, p.8). God is generically perceived as an actual entity and the 'most trivial puff of existence in far-off empty space'. The description of actual entity's generic character is the same as God's; in principle, they are on the same level though there are differences in their grades of importance and function. God is primordial.

The world we live in and everything that is, is built up of actual occasions. 'Concrescence' is employed by Whitehead to describe the process in which the universe of many things acquires an individual unity. However, there are not two things: the 'concrescence' and the 'novel thing'. The analysis of novel thing exposes us to nothing but the concrescence. Actuality therefore means an ultimate entry into the concrete; it is the decision amid 'potentiality'. Eternal objects are the pure potentials of the world. They are potentialities for actual entities. Their conceptual recognition does not involve a reference to any definite actual entities. An eternal object in abstraction from any one particular actual entity is a potentiality for ingression into actual entities (Sherburne 1981, p.22). Even in ingression into actual entity, it retains its potentiality of indefinite diversity of modes of ingression. So the great distinction between an actual entity and an eternal object lies in the former being a 'stubborn matter of fact' and the later 'never loses its accent of potentiality' (Sherburne 1981, p.22).

Eternal objects, God and Creativity form the three formative elements and through their mutual interaction, the universe of actual entities emerges. Eternal objects determine how the world of actual entities enters into the constitution of each one of its members via its feelings. God mediates between eternal objects and actual entities. Actual occasions arise by their participation in eternal objects and the two are mediated by God who combines the actuality of what is temporal with the timelessness of what is potential. The Aristotelian principle that outside actual things, there is nothing is upheld in this Whiteheadean recognition of the divine element. Thus apart from God, there could be no relevant novelty (Sherburne 1981, p.27). God is the creator of each actual entity. This however does not imply that the creativity of the universe is to be ascribed to God's volition. God is the aboriginal condition and instance of creativity. As primordial, God is the unlimited conceptual realization of the absolute wealth of potentiality (Sherburne 1981, p.32) and in this aspect; he is not *before* all creation but *with* all creation. The third formative element is creativity which is the principle of novelty. It introduces novelty into the content of many which are the universe disjunctively (Sherburne 1981, p.33). Thus, creativity is that ultimate principle by which the many, which are the universe disjunctively, become the one actual occasion which is the universe conjunctively (Sherburne 1981, p.34).

Actual entities and the formative elements are the building blocks of the universe but are microcosmic whereas we live in a macrocosmic world of people, houses, trees, etc.

Transmutation is employed by Whitehead to move for the first realm of microcosmic reality to the second realm of macrocosmic reality. Thus, transmutation is the operation whereby an aggregate of many actual occasions, forming a nexus, is prehended not as an aggregate, not as a many, but as a unity, as one macrocosmic unity (Sherburne 1981, p.73). It is through transmutation that the macrocosmic world emerges.

The movements within and without the microcosmic into the macrocosmic reality all happen as a process. There is a constant interaction among the cosmic entities. This is the crux of Whitehead's philosophy of organism. Life is change: becoming and perishing like the 'omnia flux' of Heraclitus. Even our ideas are in process and so timeless reality holds no allure for process thought. The 'cogito ergo sum' of Descartes holds no water in Process thought as it presents the problem of Cartesian dualism. In Process thought, every macrocosmic reality is in constant becoming and perishing as the microcosmic reality experiences the same. 'Substance' presented in Cartesian philosophy as the essential element in the composition of an immediate actual entity is flawed by the process thought. Whitehead asserts.

Descartes allowed the subject-predicate form of proposition and the philosophical tradition derived from it to dictate his subsequent metaphysical development. For his philosophy, 'actuality' meant 'to be a substance with inhering qualities'. For the philosophy of organism, the percipient occasion is its own standard of actuality (1985, p.145).

There is a constant interaction within the cosmic entities and these interactions are the reasons for change: becoming and perishing. Process ethics emerges as a result of this interaction. As Mesle puts it, "It is only as I see that you and I are connected, that our lives and actions affect each other that the possibility of ethical thought and action emerges" (2008, p.18). Moral vision is not possible where one sees one's life as totally disconnected from others. Whitehead's moral theory is therefore inseparable from his social philosophy and this accounts for the absence of 'ethics' in his works. The *Adventures of Ideas* should be understood as an ethical work of Whitehead.

In process ethics, moral vision is creative. Moral creativity is the attempt to transform reality for the better. The adaptation of both social and personal structures to tolerate modes of valuation and achievement not previously possible is a genuinely creative process in Whitehead's ontology. Individuals with respect to moral values should be judged both by the quality of their own experience and their contribution to the experience of others. The ultimate moral values of Whitehead's system are individual moments of value experience – actual occasions.

Process ethics contrasts the traditional philosophy of substance of Plato and Aristotle. The philosophy of substance is the view that a fixed reality underlies the changing world of ordinary experience. Whereas substance philosophy emphasizes static being, process philosophy emphasizes dynamic becoming. Thus everything is in process including our moral thoughts and principles. For process theologians, God too is in the process of growth and development as His relationship with things is in such a way that He is affected by the relationship and so changes. So in the light of everything experiencing growth and development in process thought, process ethics is defined. Just as reality is understood as in constant process and change in process thought, Ethics and morals are also viewed as growing and changing. Whitehead believed that there are no whole truths, all truths are half-truths. It is trying to treat them as whole truth that plays the devil.

The Place of Foundationalism in Process Thought

An attempt to juxtapose the two key words of the paper: Foundationalism and Process ethics would raise the traditional paradox of change and permanence. Foundationalism aligns with permanence as it epistemologically emphasizes the certainty of knowledge. Process ethics as a process thought on the other hand aligns with change. This paper tries to mediate between these by asserting that there is something permanent in every change and something changes in every permanence. Pragmatism therefore would have to play a crucial role with the case of study: gay marriage.

GAY MARRIAGE IN OUR SOCIETY

Gay marriage or same-sex marriage is marriage between two persons of the same gender identity or biological sex. The first laws in modern times allowing same-sex marriage were enacted in the first decade of the 21st century. The debate on the legalization of same-sex marriage is presently highly controversial within nations. While some countries especially in Europe and America have legalized it, others have either denounced it with sanctions on those who will ever raise the issue or have become sluggish in matters that pertain to it. Statistics show that as of November 2015, fourteen countries (Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Norway, Portugal, Spain, South Africa, and Sweden) and several sub-national jurisdictions (parts of Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States) allow same-sex couples to marry (see https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Same-sex_marriage). On the other hand, countries like Russia, Zimbabwe, Nigeria (and indeed most African countries except South Africa) have kicked against the legalization of same-sex marriage. The controversy rages on with arguments and counter-arguments. (Bidstrup 2013).

The repudiation to gay-marriage is predominantly seen among developing countries and countries with strong religious orientations. In Nigeria and Zimbabwe for example, the legalization of gay-marriage is opposed vehemently by the government. President Olusegun Obasanjo in 2006 introduced legislation that prohibits same-sex marriage and criminalizes anyone who "performs, witnesses, aids or abets" such ceremonies. Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe has also kicked against any attempt to talk about gay-marriage in his country. Kenya, ahead of Obama's visit to their country in July 2015, made it clear that gay rights is a 'non-issue' in their country and warned Obama to steer clear of gay marriage issue on his visit to his fatherland. Studies conducted in several countries indicate that support for the legal recognition of same-sex marriage increases with younger people with high levels of education.

The purported trace of same-sex marriage among the Igbo people of Nigeria is a misinterpretation of facts. Dr. Okechukwu Mezu's article titled: "There is No Tradition of Same Gender Marriage in Igboland" (see www.blackacademypress.com/articles/28-nonfiction/6-gender-marriage) did justice to Leo Igwe's article of 19th June 2009 which alleges that Same sex marriage is practiced in Igboland. The Igbo cultural permission for woman to woman bond should be viewed from the spectacle of responsibility rather than love or sexual orientation. A woman getting married to a woman, sparingly noticed among *Ndi* Igbo of Nigeria is only done exclusively for the purpose of keeping alive a family root from extinction. When a man dies without leaving behind children (males) for the continuation of the family name, the wife (if she cannot bear children any longer) is culturally allowed to marry a younger

woman who will bring forth male children for the deceased man. This culture has nothing to do with sexual orientation which is the consideration of this paper.

FOUNDATIONALISM, PROCESS ETHICS AND GAY-MARRIAGE

In defense of speculative philosophy, Whitehead defined speculative philosophy as "…the endeavour to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted" (1985,p.3). Ours is a society of diversified experiences and thus we need more than ever, this coherent, logical and necessary general idea for proper interpretation of our particular experiences. Whitehead further explained this interpretation to imply adequacy and applicability. Thus the notion of interpretation presupposes that, "…everything of which we are conscious, as enjoyed, perceived, willed or thought, shall have the character of a particular instance of the general scheme" (1985, p.3). This paper proposes that any system of thought that satisfies the criteria of coherence, logicality and necessity becomes the foundation upon which reality is interpreted. Process thought is the foundation upon which every other reality is interpreted. Its coherence is exemplified in the inability of its isolated part to be meaningful. Its logicality is exemplified in the sequential building blocks it proposes that has no contradiction. Its necessity is exemplified in the fact that it bears in itself, its own warrant of universality.

Process thought is the epistemological foundation upon which our experiences can be interpreted. Everything is in process of generation and corruption; ever becoming and perishing. Process ethics is ethics in movement; movement for the better. Ethical issues keep generating and corrupting for a fresher ethical generation. Nothing will ever be the same again as all things are in process of becoming. Even God's consequent nature experiences change as He is involved in the change of created things.

Yesterday, gay marriage was never an issue that bugged the human race. Today, it is highly controversial and capable of tearing nations apart. Process thought (process ethics) becomes a veritable system that interprets the present situation. The actual entities that formed societies have generated, corrupted and regenerated into the present ethical issue of gay marriage. The solution which process philosophy necessarily brings to the fore is that of tolerance. As no actual entity can be predicted as its next becoming, as it relates with other actual entities towards a unity, so is the unpredictability that characterizes societies. Process ethics advocates for ethical relativism which is not corrosive of the moral life. Relativism here applies to systems of morality that point towards ultimate facts, values, purposes and meanings ingredient in the fundamental nature of things. It means dependent on and limited by the inventory of truth-finding and truth- testing resources available at a given time and place to a particular interpreter. Thus process ethics advocates for pragmatic relativism for resolution of questions of meaning, morality, purpose and metaphysical ultimacy.

CONCLUSION

The question of certainty of knowledge is the crux of foundationalism. In ethical issues, the application of foundationalism has always dogmatized theories and fanaticized people. Process ethics becomes a veritable tool in the face of such interpretation of conflicting experiences. Gay marriage, one of the most recent ethical issues when interpreted with the foundation

advocated by process ethics produces a kind of pragmatic relativism which advocates tolerance to the chaos among nations.

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