

Philosophical Anthropology and The Concept of Human Nature in The Contemporary Society

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ABSTRACT: *The problem is that, in contemporary society in which we live, there seems to be a negligence in identifying what is in conformity with human nature than the contrary. The over-riding issue is “workability” whether good or bad, to the detriment of goodness (virtue). Analytically, this work sets out to underscore the fact that prior to the contemporary society, virtuous living thrived so much. It was observed that there was a shift from the ocentricism to secularism. Cultural infiltrations balked the long existing primordial cultures, diverting man’s attention to what is in vogue without any consideration to its incongruity to human nature. Therefore, for man to re-determine himself, there must be a counter-shift to virtuous living in tandem with his nature.*

KEY WORDS: human nature, contemporary society, religion, culture, morality.

INTRODUCTION

It is assumed that man is a being in the world. Of all the animals created by God, he is the only creature with a human nature and rationality, as distinct from all other living creatures. He desires the good and goes out in pursuit of it, and finds himself in a society that is in a continuous change, evolving from the ancient to the contemporary society. In all these societies (ancient to contemporary) human nature (essence) remains the same, only human behaviours are in a continuous change. But we should know that, human nature (essence) is manifested through human behaviours through which man is judged as man, or as a human being.

The pertinent question is, as philosophical anthropology concentrates on having a philosophical reflection on man, has human nature been the same in this contemporary society? Has man’s way of thinking and acting etc., been the same? Has there been any

changes? If there are, are they for good or bad? Are they in consonance with man's nature as man? To answer these questions, this work will cast a cursory look at the main thrust of philosophical anthropology and concentrate on human nature as it is influenced in the contemporary society.

Philosophical anthropology and Human Nature

Philosophical anthropologists, having had a critical study on man observed that, owing to man's preponderantly underdetermined nature, he must determine himself. This investigative study has equally discovered that what distinguishes philosophical anthropology is its ontological focus on man as the mediator of his own nature. This is why man, as a being that determines himself, and as the mediator of his own nature, must make use of his rationality in determining and mediating himself.

Additionally, in order to fully understand man, philosophical anthropologists always dig into his existence, experiences, and anxieties through the methods of *Vestehen* and reduction. Consequentially, philosophical anthropology can make a critique of society at the slightest detection of any discordant voice not in alignment with human nature as man is the creator of cultures. It becomes more visible in this assertion that philosophical anthropology studies man as a creature and man as the creator of cultural values, man as seen by a scientific observer and man as interpreted by himself.

It seeks to elucidate the basic qualities that make man what he is and distinguishes him from other beings. Following this trajectory, the importance of philosophical anthropology becomes more evident and clearer that man should, not only create cultural values but preserve and teach them.

Similarly, human nature in itself refers to the distinguishing characteristics, including ways of thinking, feeling and acting, which humans tend to have naturally independently of the influence of culture. Making a departure from this point of view, one can easily recall that man has the related powers of propositional speech and conceptual thought which are totally lacking in all other animals. This makes him unique. And as such, he is expected to behave rationally and exhibit a high sense of morality tainted with dignity. Being a product of culture and a creator of culture, man should know that the onus lies on him to positively influence the culture he creates. Let us now cast a panoramic view on the human nature in the contemporary society.

Philosophical Considerations of the Human Nature in the Contemporary Society

Because every philosopher philosophizes from the milieu in which he lives, this work will mainly concentrate on human nature in Igbo cultural context in relation to the contemporary society. It is important to note that, though this work is a philosophical

investigation and not on religious studies, the man in question (Igbo man, even among various cultures and traditions has his beliefs) has some undeniable belief in God (Chukwu). Of all the creation narratives (theories) he nourishes this strong belief that God created him and the world, with the mandate of obedience to him and subduing the earth (positive control). Ipso facto, this work will be looked at from these two dimensions:

1. Theological cum Religious dimension.
2. Socio-cultural dimension.

Theological cum Religious dimension

It has been observed that the arbitrary shift from theocentricism to secularism has been the bane of the society. Its tentacles extending to the decline of the influence of the church, the family and the local community have really impoverished the quality of life in the contemporary society. This type of decay was caused by the societal departure from man's real and expected ways of living and doing things. As the society is changing with man's ways of living and acting, human nature (human essence) remains intact. Viewed this way, society is not a piece of equipment, rather an uncontrollable force that presses humans into a way of life that does not really fit them.

Morality is now at its lowest ebb. On this Emile Durkheim (1897) was also not very positive and observed growing moral disorientation, which he called "anomie". In his view, the modernization process disrupts the communal basis of morality, amongst other things because social control is reduced, and he provided evidence that this development had boosted suicide rates.

In the olden days, human nature was held sacrosanct as witnessed in many of Igbo cultures and traditions, hence the existence of taboos (nso ala) and varying sacrilegious acts. Practices like incest, homosexuality, lesbianism, adultery, unwanted pregnancies, divorce, stealing, and murder e. t. c., were abhorred. They were unwelcome practices, even among the pagans, to prove to you their innocence would list them out as among the things they had avoided.

Similarly, before a man gets married, all the rules guiding traditional marriage rites must be observed. These strict rules and measures inculcate in the couple the needed discipline, self-control and the spirit of continence that would help them all through life. But the reverse is the case in the contemporary society. Homosexual and lesbian marriages are now celebrated. Did the creator not make them male and female with the natural attraction between the opposite sex and the contrary an aberration? The sense of the sacred is now thrown to the dust. This is sheer madness and aberration that abates the dignity of the human person. The resultant effect of all these atypical acts and behaviours in the contemporary society is the multiplicity of evil and crimes.

Socio-cultural Dimension

The pristine Igbo society highly cherished, preserved and practiced communalism, hence the saying “United We Stand, Divided We Fall”, (Umunna bu ike – Unity is might, and the Egbe bere and Ugo bereism - Let the kite and the eagle perch, any one that prevents the other from perching should show it where it will perch). There was love, peace and tranquility and people were helping each other especially in difficulties. Hospitality was practiced and extended even to the extended families without any restriction to nuclear families. These things are no longer there, rather, individualism takes place. People now prefer befriending their computers and phones to their fellow human beings. Equally, opportunism, get-rich-quick mentality and the likes are among the other things now obtainable. Machiavellian principle of might is right is practiced in order to amass wealth so as to maintain one’s ascendancy.

In the political realm, the worst is even happening. The olden days of using the allocated funds to better the condition of the society has gone and replaced with that of killings, embezzlements and settlements in order to remain in power. The days of justice and truthfulness are gone. Virtuous living has been dethroned by vicious living, to the detriment of the society. It has metamorphosed to the life of laziness and enjoyment devoid of hard work. Children are no longer trained well and taught how to do domestic works, rather maids and house boys are preferred. This sometimes leads to sexual abuse by the maids and house boys, thereby leading them into sinful behaviours that may follow them for life. People now lack proper family upbringing.

Additionally, the advancement of science and technology aimed at the betterment of man has been misused resulting in the alienation of man. Terrorism, warfare, armed robberies, drug abuse e t. c., are the raging societal problems. Freud (1930), in his book, “unbehagen in der Kurltur” (Society and its discontents) asserts that any social organization requires the repression of instinctual urges, and that the development of modern society necessitates ever more repression of natural urges. Hence, he believed that societal civilization is antithetical to human happiness and that we are less happy than our primitive forefathers. One can see that the production and watching of pornographic videos are in vogue, where man reduces himself to live like mere immoral animals like dogs. Though we cannot downplay the importance of the advancements in science and technology in this 21st century, but owing to its misuse and abuse, the adverse effects on human nature are now enormous. There is now the production of plastic Rice and fish by countries like China. Even the foods we eat have changed. People now prefer foods like noodles (Indomie) to the traditional foods eaten by our forefathers that enabled them live well and longer. Some of these foods have carcinogenic effects. Even nursing mothers do not breast feed their

children well, preferring milk and other beverages. And what is the result? - only the breeding of citizens with various vices.

Furthermore, globalization is both a blessing and a boon in the contemporary society. It made cultural infiltration possible, leading to a change in our eating habits, ways of thinking, acting, attires etc., and even in the transfer of diseases like the current COVID-19 pandemic ravaging the whole world. Where are the scientists? Everything is now at a stop, no progress, flights, church gatherings, clubs for fun, e. t. c. Even the names people now answer have changed making it difficult to trace people's countries and families of origin. For instance, a person from Amanator in Ideato South Local Government Area of Imo State, Nigeria, answering Albert Samuel (boy) and Cynthia Samuel (girl) as against the former practices.

CONCLUSION

Human nature has been turned around in the contemporary society. From the foregoing, it is evident that man (with particular reference to the Igbo man) has alienated himself in the contemporary society from the theological cum religious and socio-cultural points of view. Jean Jacques Rousseau made it unequivocally clear that man was good in the state of nature but was corrupted by the society. Philosophical anthropology tries to study man holistically for a better comprehension of man in order to strike a balance. Man has lost his bearing, shattering his nature and natural endowments in the name of modernity. He needs a rethink so as to come back to re-determine himself as well as regain his identity. This becomes evident when man's life and activities in the ancient times and now are accurately assayed.

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