

DESCRIPTIVE STATEMENTS AND THE SUPER-MAXIM

By

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Abstract

Humans or man in his society must necessarily possess sets of belief that he must depend on to remain sane. He learns to hold trustworthy factual statements and also to abide by them as universal imperatives. Such judgments includes facts such as feeling secure among families and close friends in the typical African community, feeling a sense of oneness in times of conflict, having a totem to run to in time of strife. This research work shall take time to evaluate Asouzu's concept of the super-maxim, as to create a clearer perception of what judgment should be held as error free.

Keywords: Descriptive, Statements, Super-Maxim

Introduction

The concept of the descriptive statement and the super-maxim is firmly anchored on Asouzu's philosophy of complementary reflection (*Ibuanyidanda*). This background seeks to expose the very commonsensical judgments we have always been led to make per Incurian. Humans or man in his society must necessarily possess sets of belief that he must depend on to remain sane. He learns to hold trustworthy factual statements and also to abide by them as universal imperatives. Such judgments includes facts such as feeling secure among families and close friends in the typical African community, feeling a sense of oneness in times of conflict, having a totem to run to in time of strife.

Descriptive statements in this context refers to the statements of facts that are self-evident in reality. The above examples are also examples of descriptive statements. In other words, we can see descriptive statement to be a kind of imperative that is conceive either naturally or culturally, based on one's origin;

with attributes of being held in high esteem. Examples of such are: statements that report, sentiments, statements that portray negativity and also ideas held by group of individuals who share a common goal.

The concept of the super-maxim is anchored on the quest for self-preservation. In this sense, when one acts on a super-maxim, one may always mistake its hypothetical nature for an imperative. Here, Asouzu (pg 22) reduces all forms of super-maxim to a single concept thus: the nearer, the better, and the safer. In a broader sense, these concepts connote a sense of self-preservation one has for his or herself and his or her immediate neighbours. He or she feels more secure in the hands of his neighbours than that of a stranger. He feels if he were to cheat one, he would be morally justified if he does that to a stranger.

This research work shall take time to evaluate Asouzu's concept of the super-maxim, as to create a clearer perception of what judgment should be held as error free.

Clarification Of Concepts

a. Descriptive statements

According to the online dictionary, descriptive statements can be referred to as statements of facts that pertain to what is real. In this sense, all human endeavours are centred on some basic principles or statements of facts. For example we say "All ladies love pink colour". It is actually held as a fact that pink is a female attributed colour and anyone who wears it is either a lady or a man who feels like associating with ladies. It is worthy of note that descriptive statements may be statements of facts but not valid in all cases. In other words, what man may think is actually the case or what he or she has held to be a fact or principle by which he or she lives by may at the end, turn out to be false.

b. Super-maxim

The concept of the super-maxim is a coinage by Asouzu in his *Ibuanyidanda* philosophy to connote codes of conducts by which individuals exist common to the typical African society. In most instances, one may likely mistake the super-maxim to be the same as Kant's maxim. To this extent, we think it worthy to make a distinction. Kant's maxims are enshrined in his categorical imperatives. To be simplistic, here, Kant argues that maxims are codes of our own origins by which we must necessarily abide with.

Will Durant (pg 209) quotes Kant thus:

A maxim is the categorical imperative in us, the unconditional command of our conscience, to act as if the maxim of our action were to become by our will a universal law of nature.

The above illustration of a maxim is different from Asouzu's conception of the super-maxim. For Asouzu, the super-maxim is a;

Law-like dictate, which is anchored on our fundamental natural instinct of self-preservation, following which clear and distinct judgment, committed unbiased action, over matters become difficult, if not impossible (pg 02).

Here, Asouzu conceives it as a dictate of an hypothetical background which we are most likely to refer to as a universal imperative, as that of Kant. In a strict sense, the super-maxim can be concocted with the phrase of "The Nearer, the better and the safer".

Descriptive Statements And The Super-Maxim; A Philosophical Exposition

What is the connection between descriptive statements and the super-maxim? How can we resolve the issue of negativity in the above concepts. These are the issues we seek to address under this heading. As noted earlier, descriptive statements are statements of facts pertaining to reality. Facts, in the sense that, humans or individuals in a given society hold them as bodies of knowledge or instantiations by which one is compelled to abide with. Descriptive statements here is like a principle stating how one ought to live. On the other hand, a super-maxim is a hypothetical injunction that directs the conscience of a given society. Asouzu seeks to rid the super-maxim of its negativity.

The super-maxim here influences our day to day judgments and actions. To be simplistic, we can assume that if a thing is nearer to us, it possesses a sense of security and we can trust it, hence, the concept of the super-maxim. For Asouzu, we can formulate a super-maxim descriptively thus:

The more removed a thing is from our intimate region of belongingness, our immediate neighbourhood, our ethnic, clannish and tribal world of reference, the less are we

obliged to it and the more can we exploit it freely with impunity for our own survival, and in this case even without remorse.

Here, negatively, the super-maxim is a tendency to exploit strangers with a free conscience, i.e. we make gains on the pains of others without our conscience pricking us. This is because we have mistaken such maxim to be moral in all aspects. In this situation, one behaves unjustly to another, not intimate to him as though it is just to do so. Such things are occasionally noticed in our African background and are even universal. In this case, one is guided by the sentiments of his own ethnic origin rather than by the sense of doing what is right as right.

Following the concept of the super-maxim, individuals regard those closer to them safer. By so doing, one is cultured into believing that he is quite unsafe if in the hands of strangers. It is in the midst of families and friends that he must seek solitude. Their lives and security strongly depend on the bonds they share. Such actions are shared in our communities. By so doing, they will regard one another as a key to achieving their common goals. Here, they equate statements in the semblance of their super-maxim as being true. Since this descriptive statements are mere hypothetical rules, they are led into believing that it is always true because it conforms to their super maxim. But is it always the case that people nearer to you are safer. In our different life experiences, we come to realize that there are situations where people we thought are our families and friends, which appeals a sense of security, betray us. In the issue of land dispute your brother may kill you so as to possess your land. Here, we notice it is illogical to believe that those closer to us are safer. According to Asouzu, what this implies is that the super-maxim that guides us in our decision making and judgments can always lead us to fallacious conclusions, which would have been avoided if we were to act the other way round. Here, we tend to draw valid conclusions from fallacious premises which appear to be valid. By doing this, we equate this false judgments to universal imperatives and at the end, accept it as a necessary condition for one to be just.

By accepting the super-maxim (as an hypothesis) as the bedrock of our judgments, we are confined into a crucible of fallacies. In our various decisions, we are cultured to think that any other person apart from those nearer to us does not have our interest at heart. We always suspect the next person. Here, we tend to make decisions binding on all that anybody outside our community are

instrumental to our failures and shortcomings. Asouzu in his philosophy of complementary reflection advocates for a radical change of the conception of the super-maxim by; first, evolving principles and an imperative similar to human ambivalent challenges; and second, by engaging in a noetic propaedeutic.

From Asouzu's assumption of the ambivalent tension of constraining mechanism and phenomena, the world or reality present itself to us in double capacity (in the words of Peter Bisong) in which we are faced with the crisis and tension by expressing our rationality or subjective self preservation.

Now, do these constraining mechanism gives us the impetus to accept most descriptive statements as super-maxims given that in most cases its potency is untrue or invalid. If we completely accept it, we will then be dealing with what Asouzu describes as errors of transposition.

On the other hand, what *Ibuanyidanda* presupposes is that there is no complete divisiveness in reality as intellectually ordained by western pedagogy, rather there is beneath these two spheres of reality a missing link, in which exist complementarity. The theory of complementary reflection (*Ibuanyidanda*) asserts that though there exist separate realities, the essence of their existence is the collaboration and "complementation" (missing link) that exist among. The phrase *Ibuanyidanda* (no load is insurmountable for *danda*) in its analogy expresses the strength in unity or the essence of unity of purpose. Its normative strength may be questionable in the case where it is universally observed or applied given that we may be dealing with error of transposition if we uncritically assumes that what is valid for *danda* (one group, society, phase, reality) is also valid for the other (human). In the words of Asouzu, error of transposition ensures the moment we transpose contents; from one context to the other quite arbitrary and thereby assumes that they uphold identical meaning within the new context. *Ibuanyidanda* evolves these associations where actors may erroneously see the world in a unilateral mode where one context will be uncritically assumed upon or given same identical meaning to another context not minding their socio-biological difference. This most times makes actors prey to irrational judgment. Such descriptive statement often contain premises we may presume are true but may be flawed because they contain the phenomenon of concealment which have prized the actors interest, choices and experience, ignoring the ambivalent side of this action to themselves.

Thus these *Ihe mkpuchi anya* phenomena constraining mechanism, which conceals our rationality prevents us from seeing the world in its dual capacity, give the reason why we accept most descriptive statements as true, even when all are not true or valid. This error of reasoning according to Asouzu leads us to turn to the hypothetical maxim “the nearer, the better and safer” to a categorical statement. Because the actor assumes that if the theory of *Ibuanyidanda* could be true, then it can be universalized and related to the human society. This may lead us to what Asouzu calls existential fallacy because the nearer may not always be the better rather Asouzu noted that this will only spur ethnocentric or discriminative commitments.

However, given the perceived security an actor assumes in the descriptive statement and the nearer the safer maxim; that he is more safer sharing bonds of intimacy with those nearer the actor will erroneously turn this hypothetical injunctions into categorical command. He also abandons the other side which he sees as important, even though it may still have an impact upon him.

Though the hypothetical injunctions seeks to help actor uphold an intimate bond, it may also end up deceiving them to believing that only those nearer to them are better and safer always, because of this sense of intimacy there evolve a commitment to one another and dependence of function and existence they believed that their personal interest would only be achieved through group interest or co-existence. Thus, the realization of this only spur them to accept completely any statement that have the character of the super-maxim as true and valid. However, according to Asouzu, since this statement enshrines mere hypothetical injunctions that are mistaken for categorical statements, acting in tune with them always uncritically, is bound to lead to error of judgment.

This is because the constraints imposed by the *Ihe mkpuchi anya* (phenomenon of concealment) and phenomena, may “delimit our perceptions of reality, at these moments” which easily makes us indispensable to existential fallacies; drawing what may be seemingly valid conclusion upon existential premises which are inherently flawed. What then happens is that we conclude upon irrational or illogical commands and using such conclusion or injunctions as necessarily conditions for realization of our set goals or action becomes a ridiculous error.

By adhering to super-maxims of this kind actors may erroneously commit themselves to existential fallacy especially when it is applied as a governing universal laws, negating other values which consciously or unconsciously have

impact on them, believing that they are acting on a most authentic mode, whereas they are delimited in perception by *Ihe mkpuchi anya's* phenomenon which works against human consciousness, allowing them to act beyond extremity which is erroneous.

This character of the descriptive statement which allows the tendency to exalt one's own perception of reality to an absolute stance, negating the other viewpoints making us over sensitive about our most cherished interest, while becoming less circumspect, allowing us to run into avoidable conceptual difficulties where we have made such commitment consciously or unconsciously, believing that such statements are true, we may not even bother much any longer about its negative impacts on us or grievous implications such commitments may have on our action and decisions. It becomes much problematic if we carry such mindset into our relationship with others which only make us more stubborn to our own goals forgetting the consequences or implication that may arise in-between. It is also the cause for ethnocentric divides, sentimentalism and sectional decision, where the actor considers only safer those things of value that are safer and nearer. According to Asouzu, it is the foundation of all types of ambivalent behaviours and extremist acts, something that can distort meaning to the point of actors contradicting themselves without knowing that they are actually doing so. Furthermore, this has been the foundation for irreconcilable difference, where actors are so blinded by their beliefs, interest and position that they cannot see reason with the other party, they stick to their position without realizing the mistake or how flawed it could be.

However, Asouzu asserts that such hypothetical injunction have been relied upon to justify African experience of reality. Such statement or construct are applied to validate the communal African experience of reality accordingly in the words of Asouzu, this is the case with such ideals and values as compassion, fraternal care, hospital, sincerity, thoughtfulness, the much acclaimed African religiosity and sense of the sacred, etc.

However, insisting on this legitimizing authentic African experience of the world based on this consciousness of intimacy, we are bound to face the forces of the constraints and phenomena of *Ihe mkpuchi anya* and we act selfishly and stubbornly. Furthermore, we believe that because nearer is better and safer we

tend to relate more within the intimacy region and avoid “the other side”. The resultant effect is that we become ethnocentric, selfish, sentimental and divisive.

Evaluation/Conclusion

Descriptive statements present to us with a foggy idea of an imperative when we are confused or beclouded by our judgments with our ignorance. Asouzu’s philosophy seeks to identify these issues and seeks to position it in a positive direction. The super-maxim as commonly perceived should be radicalized into a better background for our beliefs and judgments. We should reconsider our judgment of “The Nearer, the Better and the Safer”. In other for us to complement our different existence for growth, we must necessarily let go of our ethnic sentiments and subscribe to a more accommodating maxim. One should not be misled into assumptions that one is totally insecure in the midst of strangers and very secure in the midst of those intimate to him. By letting go of this belief, we are one step ahead of rescuing our day to day judgments and getting rid of fallacious contents in them.

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