

THE PROBLEM OF THE HUMAN AMBIVALENCE SITUATION

By

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Abstract

This write up has brought to the fore the ambivalence of human existential situation. The ambivalence of human situations as posited by Dr. Akpan is anchored on the notion of self-preservation which man though rational, shares with other animals that are not rational, or are of a lesser level of rationality. In our elucidation of the ambivalence of human existential situation, we have used Professor Asouzu book on this subject as the spring board on which our accentuation has been made. It suffices to note that we have agreed with him that the best way to give rational explanation of human action is to understand that human interest is ambivalent for this would lead us to know not only the observable effects of the actions but the hidden meanings of such actions.

Keywords: Human, ambivalence, existential, situation.

Introduction

Man in spite of his rationality is still beclouded with the zeal to pursue his most cherish interest, this to a considerable extend has to do with certain peculiar fundamental characteristics of his primordial instincts of self-preservation. It is in view of this that Prof. Asouzu captures this situation that confronts man as the “**human ambivalence existential situation**”. According to Prof Asouzu, even if the human person is fundamentally rational, the same human person is subject to the challenges of our fundamental instinct of self-preservation(Asouzu 11).In linewith the afore stated view, the human person is thus caught in a quagmire of being rational and being subject to our most primitive instinct therefore a tension is created within human consciousness. This is the foundation of the ambivalent tension that characterizes our consciousness and which accompanies us in all our activities as human persons.

This research work will inline with the topic seek to bring to the fore the ambivalence situation of man as well as elucidate on its problem with relevant examples.

Explication Of Concepts

a. Problem

Problem is defined as a state of difficulty that needs clarification to be resolved. In other words it is a thing that is difficult to deal with or understand.

b. Human

Human refers to someone that is related to or associated with people or humanity. It is used to refer to any living thing or member of the family that is characterized by superior intelligence, articulate speech and erect carriage.

c. Ambivalence

According to the advance learner's dictionary, ambivalence is the process of having or showing both good and bad feelings about something or somebody.

d. Situation

This English mini dictionary defines situation as a set of circumstances. Furthermore, it is defined as a happening at a particular time and in a particular place.

An Overview Of The Problem Of Human Ambivalence Situation

Mans' entire existence is beset by this phenomenon of ambivalence. As a complex animal, man or being is easily distinguishable from other animals in his physique, rationality, sociality, religiosity, creativity, political nature etc. yet as part of nature he cannot completely divorce himself from the natural tendencies prominent among them is the tendency of self-preservation. Self-preservation therefore appears to be man's strongest instinct and indeed the fulcrum from which man pursues his interest.

Professor Asouzu who has to be given immense credit as the first African philosopher to expound the problem associated with the ambivalence of human interest captures it this way: "the need to self-preservation is the primordial human interest around which human beings articulate their human action either individually or collectively". This implies that self-preservation has been man's preoccupation right from the time of Adam. Prof Asouzu in his books titled effective leadership and the ambivalence of human interest the Nigerian paradox in a complementary perspective and the method and principles of complementary reflection in and beyond African philosophy took time to explain the phenomenon of ambivalence of human interest with some mind throbbing

concrete examples. Thus there seem to be no better place to appeal to if we want to understand this phenomenon well.

Asouzu's mission statement is that human interest is ambivalent because it has a double capacity and as such can represent something negative and positive at the same time. What this implies is that in the course of pursuing our interest, we most at time would believe that what we are pursuing is something positive, and beneficial to us without knowing that on the other side of the coin what we achieve at the same time is negative. This tendency is the root cause of social disorder, crises, distrust and lack of our development as humans, state, nation and continent. Asouzu sees the phenomenon of ambivalence of human interest as something that is paradoxical. He wonders how we could explain a situation where one seeks to conserve his interest but at the same time undertakes actions that would virtually lead to his destruction and in the same time end up by losing whatever interest he was trying to conserve (15-16). Instances that can explain such paradoxicalities abound especially in Nigeria. Why should a suicide bomber for instance engage in this bizarre activity knowing quite well that at the end he would lose his life, kill other people apart from the targeted victims, why do people go to vandalize pipe lines in order to scoop out fuel illegally when they also know that they may end up being burnt to death? The foregoing shows what the human ambivalence situation is all about.

The Problem Of The Human Ambivalence Situation

Having discussed the human ambivalence situation, it would be preposterous to affirm that there is no problem with it. The ambivalence situation of humans has led to an aberration. Man has become another man's judge thereby making himself a saint and others sinners, the human tends to point and criticize his fellow man when he is not holy. This human ambivalence situation erodes the altruistic spirit in man, making man an egoistic animal that seeks his own interest first and looks for every available means to satisfy him-self before others. That man is a rapacious being is no new ideology; man tends to make decisions based on the ambivalence nature of which decisions are made blindly and unconsciously. As one could say, the ambivalence human situation has turn man from normal to the abnormal, this problem has brought about self-centered futuristically destructive decision that the human without reason would not decipher. In a bid to secure our own interest as humans, we make certain decisions that seem good to us but rather have greater effect on the future.

Example is seen in our societal norms and policies which are made by law makers in their own favour regardless of the harms this laws will inflict on others. Further example is cited by Prof. Asouzu of a businessman who wishes to be honest but the double capacity does not make him so, he finds himself trying to play honest but rather this ambivalence nature does not give him a chance. the double capacity can make us inconsistent and lead to all forms of contradictions and deviant behaviors (Asouzu 23). Asouzu further posits that the ambivalence of human interest makes us perceive or misperceive the same object differently in the same respect (Asouzu 27) therefore the way i see the well water is not the same way i see the borehole water but both are water therefore I disregard the well water and appreciate the borehole water although some feed from this well water and do not have illness.

Other problems associated with the ambivalence of human problem is the short cut to achievement rather than through hard work, broad is the way that leads to destruction and narrow to everlasting life. Humans due to its ambivalent nature do not wish to stress himself but rather would rely on negative ways to get to the top, it makes us so blind that we desire things that kills us fast; we apprise someone who does the wrong and scorn those who do the right. The human double capacity has ignorantly made man blind.

Recommendations

Most ironically is the fact that many people would detect so many things as being wrong but yet they would not go ahead to do those things that will proffer wonderful solutions to these problems. The all-embracing answer is given by Professor Asouzu to this why questions is that the ambivalence of human interest has rather blurred our views forcing us to see only the short term ad hoc benefits of our policies and not their dangers on the long run (29). This of course is true because human interest is interwoven and not homogeneous. The fundamental question is that how do we get ourselves liberated from this phenomenon, Professor Asouzu makes it lucid that we can free ourselves from this tyranny only if we make concerted conscious effort to be aware of their devastating effect. This implies that we are not usually conscious of the dangers inherent in some of the interest we pursue. If we were fully aware of the dangers associated with the ambivalence of our interest we would not sign our own death warrant. Inyang in his social engineering and ambivalence of human

interest: the Nigerian experience correctly makes the point that Prof Asouzu position may not be far from Socrates teaching that knowledge is virtue and vice is attributed to ignorance of that which is good but he seem to agree totally with Asouzu position that if we were aware of the dangers of our actions we would not do it for no man who really know what is wrong would do it.

This position is however vulnerable to the criticism leveled against Socrates identification of knowledge with virtue. Aristotle is said to have pointed out that Socrates may have forgotten the influence of the rational part of the soul and did not take sufficient notice of the fact of moral weakness which leads man to do what he want he knows to be wrong(Copleston109). We cannot in all honesty say for instance that criminals are totally ignorant people; they are people who most times have conviction within them that what they are doing is utterly wrong and devilish and yet would choose to do it. The problem appears to lie in their moral weakness which is induced when the irrational part in them subjugates the rational part. Be that as it may, what is significant about this phenomenon of human existential situation is that it is something natural, it is only when we fail to manage it successfully that we tend to act paradoxically. Asouzu propounds two basic principles of complementarism on how to manage the natural phenomenon that beset human life;

1. the principle of harmonious complementation
2. the principle of progressive transformation

The first principle of progressive transformation serves a missing link of reality, that is to say for any realty to be meaningful then the components have to be viewed complementarily that is the missing components have to be brought together such that they become aware of each other. Hence everything has a natural tendency towards its end. In this vein he summits that their transformation (that is human actions) to the purpose for which they are meant can be accomplished if one adheres to the second principle of harmonious transformation.

Conclusion

This write up has brought to the fore the ambivalence of human existential situation. The ambivalence of human situations as posited by Dr. Akpan is anchored on the notion of self-preservation which man though rational, shares with other animals that are not rational, or are of a lesser level of rationality. In our elucidation of the ambivalence of human existential situation, we have used

Professor Asouzu book on this subject as the spring board on which our accentuation have been made. It suffices to note that we have agreed with him that the best way to give rational explanation of human action is to understand that human interest is ambivalent for this would lead us to know not only the observable effects of the actions but the hidden meanings of such actions. It is our belief that if this is well understood and followed then we won't allow the human ambivalence to override us.

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