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Abstract

A person is a rational being that consciously behaves in a unique manner, projecting the qualities of rationality, altruism and responsibility. This paper demonstrated that the human person is made up of certain basic features, like rationality and consciousness, which makes him to behave morally and sometimes amorally. In addition, man's social nature is an integral dimension and expression of his rationality and freedom, which are critical to the actualization of his existential end. The paper also established that the criteria based definition of person as a rational and conscious being is not totally acceptable, but is indispensable in the projection of the true qualities that make a person.

Keywords: Ethical, Person, Altruism, Responsibility, Rationality, Consciousness.

Introduction

The term person is derived from the Latin *persona* and Greek *propopon*. Etymologically, the term was used to denote the mask worn by a factor and then was later applied to the role he played. As formulated by Boethius and later adapted by Aquinas, person is a state of being a human individual on the basis of a certain criterion. To be a person therefore, the human being must function or behave in a certain way. According to Boethius, a person is an "individual substance of a rational nature." In addition, Aquinas (1485) held that the person is an "Individual substance, complete, self-subsisting and separated from others." Omoregbe (1996), like Boethius and Aquinas, explained the criterion that qualifies a human being as a person. He explained rationality to mean consciousness even of consciousness itself. This means a person must be conscious of the fact that he is conscious. Rationality in this case also means awareness. So, a person is a rational being that consciously behaves in a unique manner, projecting the true human qualities of rationality, altruism and responsibility. This paper seeks to demonstrate that the person is made up of certain basic features, like rationality and consciousness, which makes him to behave morally and sometimes amorally. Also, it tries to establish that the criteria based definition of person as a rational and conscious being is not totally

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acceptable since, a human being can be in coma or become very old and sick but not cease to be a person.

Personhood and Man's Social Nature

Man's social nature is an integral dimension and expression of his rationality and freedom, which is critical to actualization of his existential end. Human sociality therefore presupposes personhood and personhood presupposes sociality. According to Aghamelu (2013), "personhood is the specific character of human nature that is ordained towards sociality. Specifically, it constitutes the social nature of man and the gateway to his proper understanding and realization, perfections and fulfillment." Thus personhood is indispensable to man's actualization of his full potentials as a rational being.

Personhood is the ultimate end of the sociality of man. This aspiration constitutes the basis for his realization of happiness. Happiness is realized in the society which is the home for the manifestation of his personhood. Human sociality therefore is significant only in the context of the attainment of personhood. And that is critical to building a stable, just, progressive and peaceful society.

The Person and Common Good

Common good is the good of all persons and the essence for which society exist. Better put, common good are the social infrastructure and amenities that bind a people together in the society. It is the responsibility of persons to provide all that is needed by the community, maintain and sustain it for the good of everyone. The right attitude to things that bind a people en masse is taught and championed by persons to the glory of the good of all. It defines the right order of relation between persons and entities and the society as the relation of order. There is no common good without the person and no person without common good initiatives. Both go together in building an egalitarian society.

In traditional Tiv metaphysics, much emphasis is placed on good conduct, *ieren i mimi*, as a way to sustain the ontological order of the society. By good conduct, it means engaging in worthwhile ventures, like respect for elders, humility, diligence, hard work, selflessness and obedience that will promote the peace, unity, progress and development of the society, *hanma ieren i lu i mimi, ia fatyo u van a' mzeahmen hen tyo yo*. In order to protect the interest of the society against plague from spirits, *adzov*, the Tiv have sanctions they place on individuals that challenge this lofty interest of the community. For instance, anyone caught

stealing in Tiv society, is publicly disgraced. His cloths are torn (i.e. he becomes naked) and he is beaten publicly by youths to serve as deterrent to others.

Personhood and Moral Responsibility

To be a person is to be morally responsible; taking responsibility for one's action and inaction. There are things that a person does that one wonder if the person in question is a rational being, with a sense of moral responsibility! For instance, to have sex with one's daughter is a taboo in Tiv tradition. It is believed that when close relations have sex, they are bound together and only the first person that gets married will be able to have children. Where such a thing happens, the elders, *mbaganden*, will seek to know if they are in their right senses or they acted under the influence of cultic emblems called *akombo a' ikyo gbenda*. It is believed that no Tivman will do such if not influenced by *akombo*. A normal person cannot look at his daughter and rape her. Where found normal by the elders, both of them are burnt naked inside a hut, *timbe*. While they enter the hut, *timbe*, youths wait outside with sticks and when the hut is set ablaze and they run to escape, the youths run after them, whipping them to serve as deterrent to others. The essence of burning them inside the hurt is fundamentally, to *separate* them from each other and witnesses are believed to take precaution. Meaning, they have been cleansed of the consequences of the sexual act by the community. Therefore, both of them can get married and have children.

Irresponsibility does not make a man a person; instead it makes him a coward. A right thinking person behaves in the most acceptable manner. They know the tradition and culture of their people, prevailing religious teachings and the judicial ethics of the society they live in and adhere to them in sustenance of law and order. This mannered behaviour builds an egalitarian society. It destroys ignorance and dispels the darkness of wickedness, charting the way forward for man's attainment of his existential end. Hence Exupery (2008), concludes thus, "Being a man means precisely to be responsible. It means to feel ashamed of some misery that may not have come from you. It means to be proud of a victory that colleagues have won. It means to feel that placing one's own stone, one is contributing to build the world".

Morality in Doubt

Morality is an 'innate potential' that all humans enjoy from birth. Even though, according to Locke, the human heart is a *tabula rasa* from birth, every human being enjoys the 'potential' to know what is right and wrong through *conscience* and experience. The person, for Aquinas, has the innate natural disposition to grasp the fundamental principles of morality. These moral principles are evident and the disposition to know them spontaneous. Better put, he referred to this potential as *synderesis*, a habit, a natural tendency imparted on us from nature and by which we naturally and spontaneously grasp the principles of morality. It is infallible and found in all men. Augustine referred to *synderesis* as the seeds and rules of virtue which are unchangeably true and are found in our power of natural judgment. By *synderesis* we know that certain actions are right or wrong while by conscience such principles are applied to particular cases to see whether the proposed action, given the situation in which it is to be performed, falls within the category of right or wrong, whether it should be performed or not. This potential develops by experience of custom and tradition or educational training. Often times, persons seek to know why certain actions are permissible while others are not. The fact is that the formal promotes the development of the society while the latter destroys it. One good thing is that the society has evolved to a point that almost all humans are aware of the ethics of good behavior, either through tradition, law or religion. However, there are human beings that are enlightened but seem to perpetually down play morality in their daily lives by acts of corruption. The question is, why do they persist in doing that which is immoral? In line, with the Socratic dictum, "know thyself", it can be said that having known themselves that there are two moral paths in the society, the path of light and darkness, good and evil, right and wrong, they decided to fall the path of darkness, evil and wrong.

It seems such persons have been consumed by crime which has ruined their sense of morality. Despite the fact that they are members of a moral community, they have assumed the position of amorality and feel insubordinate to the law. Etuk (2010:11) captured this aptly, "...after a person might have committed crimes or done something evil for so many times, he loses the sharper edge of his moral sense; and this is reflected in common thought and ordinary parlance when someone is accused of having silenced the voice of conscience." This could be seen in habitual criminals in the society who have become morally insensitive. Such people hardly have sympathy on their fellowmen, for them 'no means' of acquiring money is wrong, even when it cost another man's life.

For such human beings, can we say they have ceased to be moral beings? No! Criminals and brigands still show love to their girl friends, families and siblings etc. They even disagree among themselves when one feel cheated upon by a member of the gang. So, they have not totally lost sense of affection and 'love' for other humans but have found justification for their actions.

One good thing about the presence of such persons in the society is that they are in the minority. If criminals were not in the minority, no society would have been stable. In the words of Thomas Hobbes, man would have become a wolf to his fellowman. Even though, many individuals are termed corrupt in our society today, obvious criminality that brings obvious insecurity of life and property is still a mirage. Criminals and robbers have not taken over the world. The threat of terrorism looms on the international seen but it is only a major challenge in certain parts of the world like Eastern Nigeria, Syria, Pakistan and Libya etc. Majority of humanity live in touch with moral principles, hence, the outright condemnation of ideologies, policies and behaviours that threaten peaceful co-existence of man.

Apart from parents and guardians taking the ethical behavior of their children direly, religious institutions and organizations ought to take the practicability of their messages as significant as their existence. Also, law enforcement agents have to perfect their crime tracking methods and the general public too have to cooperate with law enforcement agents to curb all forms of vices and crimes in the society. This influence in the environment has a huge role to play in inhibiting unethical tendencies. Finally, the judiciary must be willing to discharge their duties with utmost fairness, transparency and justice. In these ways, just values that bind the society together are embraced and imbibed, leaving little or no room for amorality and irresponsibility in our societies.

Implications of Criteria Based Idea of Person

The criteria based idea of person compounds the challenge of who a person is. Okon (2010) observed that it "narrows down the domain of human person." It ties down the criteria for personhood therefore excluding humans who are incapable of certain functions from the class of human persons. Accordingly, Okon (2010) argued that "Rationality, for instance, does not seem a worthy yardstick to measure personhood. This is so because we have some human beings who are either incapable of rational activity on account of age or certain dysfunction of some organs and sickness. To anchor on rationality and

consciousness is to exclude the unborn, the infants, the mentally retarded, the comatose and even the aged turned senile from the category of human persons". This implies that a person in coma ceases to be human until he regains consciousness. Also, the potential of an infant to be rational and conscious only does not make him a person until fully grown and attains the age of discretion. Demonstrating the weaknesses of this position, Beckwith lamented that "where exercise of rational thought alone makes a human being a person, then she/he who is asleep, unconscious and temporarily comatose is not a person." So, in line with Okon and Beckwith', the criteria based idea of personhood narrows the understanding of persons.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, we can say that it is in the nature of the human person, by virtue of his rationality, consciousness and conscience, to behave morally. The society provides the enabling environment for the manifestation of the true potentials of personhood. And every individual ought to function in line with his or her custom and tradition, religious disposition and the law in upholding the fundamental moral principles that promote common good in the society. The criteria based understanding of person, in terms of rationality and consciousness, even though not totally acceptable, is indispensable in the projection of the true qualities that make a person.

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