

**THE PROBLEM OF ETHNIC DIVERSITY: A METAPHYSICO-
COGNITIVE ANALYSIS**

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Abstract

Ethnic diversity poses a threat to global peace, progress, and security. Nigeria serves as a prime example of this issue, as the nation grapples with internal turmoil stemming from ethnic conflicts within the socio-political landscape. The act of aligning ourselves with our ethnic groups has fueled animosity towards other ethnicities and has led us to become mentally inflexible, causing us to view the world solely through the lens of our ethnic identity. Put simply, we struggle to make sense of anything beyond our ethnic affiliations. This study delves into the challenges presented by ethnic diversity through the lens of metaphysical principles and theories from 4E Cognitive Science, utilizing a metaphysico-cognitive analysis approach. It posits that the process of aligning our worldview with our identity and relationships within our environment is an essential aspect of our existence in a shared world. Without this alignment, navigating the world becomes an insurmountable task. However, our cognitive adaptability plays a crucial role in determining whether our worldview alignment enables us to interact in a manner that promotes mutual growth and self-actualization. As cognitive beings, we are presented with a singular option to address the issues arising from ethnic diversity. This solution does not involve advocating for a form of homogeneity that favors one ethnic group over others. Instead, the focus should be on the cognitive mechanisms that govern our interactions within the world. This process must be intentional rather than incidental, emphasizing the importance of conscious effort in shaping our relationships with others.

Keywords: Diversity, Cognition, Ethnicity, Identity, Ontology **Introduction**

There exists a plethora of literature addressing the issue of ethnic diversity. Scholars have been grappling with this dilemma since the advent of modernity in an effort to comprehend it and propose solutions that foster harmonious coexistence. However, ethnic diversity poses a significant threat to global peace, advancement, and security. A prime example can be seen in the Nigerian State, where ethnic conflicts have deeply divided the socio-political landscape. The process of identifying strongly with our ethnic groups has not only fueled animosity towards other groups but has also led to cognitive inflexibility, causing us to view the world solely through the lens of our ethnic identity.

In essence, our ethnic affiliations have become the sole basis for our understanding of the world. This study employs a metaphysico-cognitive analysis to delve into the complexities of ethnic diversity, drawing upon metaphysical principles and theories from 4E Cognitive Science. It posits that at the core of the issue lies the relationship between agents and the arenas in which they operate, or what can be termed as worldview attunement.

Essentially, the paper argues that the cognitive processes that shape our interactions within society at various levels dictate whether ethnic diversity presents itself as a problem or not. The paper shall attempt to delve deeper into the concepts discussed above to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between ethnic diversity and cognitive mechanisms. Through an exploration of metaphysical principles and insights from 4E Cognitive Science, we aim to shed light on the fundamental nature of the issue at hand. By elucidating the intricate connection between agents and their operating environments, we hope to offer a clearer perspective on how worldview attunement influences our perceptions of ethnic diversity.

The Metaphysico-Cognitive Method of Analysis

This method of analysis, although unique to this work is inspired by the Canadian Cognitive Scientist, John Vervaeke. As the name implies, this method of analysis comprises adopting the principles of metaphysical thinking and the theories of 4E Cognitive Science. It is built upon the Neoplatonic tradition, first propounded by Parmenides, of seeing being as a unity, and its inseparability from thought: "1...for one thing are Thinking and Being."² Aristotle developed this proposition into a theory of knowledge known as the conformity theory of knowledge. For Aristotle, the human intellect and being conform, that is, they share the same form.³ In other words, the patterns of reality are the same with that of human

¹Eric D. Perl, *Thinking Being: Introduction to Metaphysics in the Classical Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 13.

²Thomas Davidson (ed.), *The Fragments of Parmenides* (St. Louis: E. P. Gray, 1869), 5.

³John Vervaeke, Bishop Macimus and Archimandrite Patapios, "Emergence and Emanation," (Saint Photios Orthodox Theological Seminary Podcast, published July 31, 2023), accessed April 15, 2024, <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=guDd2MXvp2U&t=3047s&pp=ygUWZW1hbmF0aW9uIGFuZCBibWFnZW5jZQ%3D%3D>.

cognition. This way of viewing reality has influenced the works of Vervaeke. And it is in this light that this work adopts it as a method of analysis.

The One and The Many: Relationality As The Ground Of Being And Intelligibility

The one - many problem in western thought finds its origin in the arguments of two ancient Greek philosophers, namely, Heraclitus and Parmenides. While Heraclitus claimed that Being is many and is characterized by endless activity, Parmenides claims Being is one and static (unchanging).⁴ This raises the question, 'how is being one yet many simultaneously?' For James Blachowicz the one - many problem started metaphysical discourse and reflections.⁵ He also warns against taking metaphysical unity and diversity, discussed in the one - many problem, for numerical unity and diversity. The problem '... fundamentally was whether reality was one or many in kind; that is, it was the homogeneity or heterogeneity of physical reality that was the principal issue.'⁶

Consequently, ancient philosophers investigated this problem, making proposals that aim at resolving the problem. Plato (c. 428-348 BC) made the first elaborate and comprehensive articulated attempt to solve the one - many problem or the problem of unity and multiplicity in being.⁷ He asked the question, 'how can many things be the same (like beautiful) yet be different?'⁸ However, for him the explanation is 'ἐν γέ τι εἶδος ταῦτον', meaning that their sameness is explained by their form (εἶδος).⁹ According to Plato, the forms which are distinct (but not independent) from particular things are the paradigms or patterns of particular things.¹⁰ In this sense, beautiful things share a proportional degree of sameness, because they all participate in the form of beauty. This is the Platonic explanation for sameness and difference or the problem of the one and the many in being.

Aristotle (384-322 BC) on the other hand, made a unique proposal that is established on the idea of forms developed by his predecessor (Plato):

Things are not merely what they are made out of, but possess forms, looks, intelligible structures or identities without which they would not be what they are. There is a real difference, for example, between a table and a heap of wood; but this difference is nothing material. What distinguishes a table from a heap of wood is not an added material

⁴James Filler, *Heidegger, Neoplatonism and the History of Being: Relation as Ontological Ground* (Switzerland: Springer Nature, 2023), 19.

⁵James Blachowicz, *Essential Difference: Toward a Metaphysics of Emergence* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2012), 17.

⁶Blachowicz, *Essential Difference*, 23.

⁷Perl, *Thinking Being*, 22.

⁸Plato, *Greater Hippias* 287d.

⁹Plato, *Meno* 72c.

¹⁰Plato, *Phaedo* 65d-e.

ingredient, but a certain shape, a structure, a form, which the table has and the heap lacks. And this form itself, as a structure or pattern, is not a material thing but an intelligible content and in that senses an idea.¹¹

By the above statements Aristotle was able to propose an explanation for difference between material individuation and intelligible or essential differences. A thing has an identity, a form, a look, an intelligible content, a structural functional organization which establishes its essential difference with other things rather than material individuation (individuation does not necessarily imply essential differences). By this articulation, one would hardly miss the fact that the one-many problem has been put in a proper context. However, in order to emphasize the essential differences of things, Aristotle postulated that the most fundamental principle of being is substance, which is independent of any accident of form of relations.

According to James Filler, the move made by Aristotle prioritizes the relata over the relation, since he made substance more fundamental and prior to relation (which is just an accident for him). By postulating the priority of relata over relation, Aristotle made things independent and raised the problem of the possibility of relationality. But if things are fundamentally relational and not isolated, the only option for an explanation is to postulate the priority of relation over relata. In essence, it is pure relations that grounds being, and without which there would be nothing.¹²

However, Filler believes we need to do more in order to justify the postulation of the priority of relation over relata. There is a need to attend to the philosophical problem that the ancient philosophers engaged with in doing metaphysics, namely, the one-many problem.¹³

Being cannot be a simple unity and neither can it be multiplicity without unity. The One cannot exist without the Many and the Many cannot be without the One. This entails that entities existing independently in themselves cannot be. One by itself cannot exist. But neither can two, since two are simply two independently existing unrelated entities. Unless there is a relation between the two, which as we have seen must be a third element that does not arise from either of the two entities by itself, two independently existing entities are no different than a single independently existing entity, and so just as one cannot be many, neither can two (since two independent entities are ultimately no different than one entity). So true multiplicity only arises in the relation between two things, and thus, it is ultimately the case that to exist independently is to not exist at all.¹⁴

¹¹Perl, *Thinking Being*, 75.

¹²Filler, Heidegger, Neoplatonism, and the History of Being, 11-12.

¹³Filler, Heidegger, Neoplatonism, and the History of Being, 13.

¹⁴Filler, Heidegger, Neoplatonism, and the History of Being, 13-14.

It is hard to miss the emphasis that it is the convergence of both unity and multiplicity that affords being. John Vervaeke has a unique way of postulating this; he says that the relationality of being is manifest in the convergence of the phenomena of the oneing and the manying simultaneously.¹⁵

Consequently, the necessary and complementary relation between the *one* and the *many*, makes intelligibility possible, since intelligibility is fundamentally relational.

The Ontological Necessity of Ethnic Diversity

When differences are ontologically essential, it appears logical to infer the ontological necessity of ethnic diversity. This might appear as a radical claim, yet, it might not be far-fetched. By first considering the submissions of the social sciences on the formation and maintenance of ethnic boundaries, this work investigates the relevant implications of the ontological claim of the priority of relations in the one-many problem, and the essential nature of differences. Academics have made various submissions on the formation of ethnic groups. Various academic perspectives in the social sciences appear relevant. According to Fredrik Barth, anthropological literatures espouse an understanding of an ethnic group, by emphasizing it as a group of persons that:¹⁶

1. Is largely biologically self-perpetuating
2. Shares fundamental cultural values, realized in overt unity in cultural forms
3. Makes up a field of communication and interaction.
4. Has a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order.¹⁷

These features appear relevant in characterizing an ethnic group, its boundary, identity and uniqueness, only when informed by the ascriptive feature of ethnic identity, which is primary to all other features. Barth thinks we should emphasize the ascriptive feature of ethnic identity in order to avoid the problem of explaining how ethnic identity endures despite cultural or geographical change. In essence, there is the sense that groups ascribe to itself and its members a sense of belonging and identity, hence, all cultural patterns, ecological domain, territory, etc., become meaningful to every member of that ethnic group.¹⁸ It might appear at first glance that by postulating the primacy of the ascriptive feature of ethnic identity, the essential nature of differences has been dissolved, by subjectivizing ethnic differentiation. This is not the case when one deeply

¹⁵Vervaeke, "Emergence and Emanation."

¹⁶Fredrik Barth (ed.), *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), 10.

¹⁷Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 10-11.

¹⁸Barth ed., *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 13-15.

Thomas Hylland Eriksen, while commenting on Barth's presentation said,
It is widely held, by social scientists as well as by lay people, that the members of human groups have an “innate” propensity to distinguish between insiders and outsiders, to delineate social boundaries and to develop stereotypes about “the other” in order to sustain and justify these boundaries. If this is indeed the case, ethnicity can be conceived of as being nearly as universal a characteristic of humanity as gender and age – unlike the phenomena of nationhood and nationalism, which have been so conceptualized in the academic community as to concern the modern world only.¹⁹

It is hard to miss out Eriksen's emphasis on the universal and hence necessary nature of ethnic boundaries or identity, as he placed it in the same category as gender and age. Eriksen also notes that, “Marx and Engels held, probably correctly, that sex, age and the insider-outsider distinction were universal criteria of differentiation.”²⁰ This means that the fact that people organized themselves naturally and necessarily into groups, in a way that informs their perception and conception of reality and being or acting in the world, is indispensable for all human historical periods. This makes ethnicity ahistorical.

Furthermore, taking the relational nature of all existents, we can postulate two ways in which things are relationally relevant, namely, the proximate relationally relevant and the remote relationally relevant. The proximate relationally relevant refers to those forms of relations that are very immediate to our being and functioning in the world as humans. For example, all humans are born in a varying circle of relations, starting with the family. It is in this sense that ethnic groups manifest as a proximate relation, which influence the meaning making process, and proper relational functioning of the individual.

On the other hand, the remote relationally relevant are those forms of relations that are distant, for example, between two ethnic groups. In this sense, saying that ascriptive feature of ethnic identity is primary, is just a way of emphasizing that the form of relations within ethnic groups are proximally essential to every individual, so that there is a sense of appropriation of these relations by them. In essence, “relations” is not vacuous; it manifests within relevance. Hence, ethnic

¹⁹Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1999), and Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), quoted in Thomas Hylland Eriksen, “The Epistemological Status of the Concept of Ethnicity,” *Anthropological Notebooks* 25, no. 1 (2019): 27.

²⁰Thomas Hylland Eriksen, “The Epistemological Status of the Concept of Ethnicity,” *Anthropological Notebooks* 25, no. 1 (2019): 27.

diversity is essential for human beings to function in the world. It is not an accident of history but a manifestation of an ontological truth about the relational nature of being.

The Illusion of Ethnic Homogeneity

Many people are other People... Their thoughts are someone else's opinions, their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation²¹. This quote by Oscar Wilde, opened the preface of Amartya Sen's seminal work, "Identity and Violence", where he examined the great influence of group identity in propagating sectarianism, group hatred and extreme violence, as has manifested in Kosovo, Bosnia, Rwanda, Timor, Israel, Palestine, Sudan, [Nigeria] etc.²² In this introductory note, Sen observed that,

...many of the conflicts and barbarities in the world are sustained through the illusion of a unique and choiceless identity. The art of constructing hatred takes the form of invoking the magical power of some allegedly predominant identity that drowns other affiliations and in a conveniently bellicose form can also overpower any human sympathy or natural kindness that we may normally have. The result could be homespun elemental violence, or globally artful violence and terrorism²³

Sen's presentation seems to be a villainization of group identity. It is not the case, he emphasizes that "our shared humanity is savagely challenged when the manifold divisions in the world are unified into one allegedly dominant system of classification – in terms of religion, or community, or culture, or nation, or civilization..."²⁴ This means, his concern is the fact that defining human identity by certain small categorization is a disservice to the multiple aspects that factor in human identity. He believes humans are very relational and their identities are defined by a plurality of affiliations, beyond a single category; as such, miniaturization of human beings would not let us see it.⁴² The implication in his position is an attempt to show that humans are diversely different. In this sense, he sees it as an illusion of destiny to think that any form of homogeneity as regards ethnicity or religion etc., is obtainable. In essence, "we have to see clearly that we have many distinct affiliations and can interact with each other in a great many different ways (no matter what the instigators and their flustered opponents tell us). There is room for us to decide our priorities."²⁵ In essence, when we see the necessity for relations to be both proximately and remotely relevant, it becomes clear that ethnic homogeneity is an illusion. Our drive for a homogeneous nation where all differences are resolved, is the product of self-deception. Differences, are not dissolvable, they can only be processed for the greater good. There cannot

²¹Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (Massachusetts: Penguin Books, 2005), 11.

²²Sen, *Identity and Violence*, 11.

²³Sen, *Identity and Violence*, 11.

²⁴Sen, *Identity and Violence*, 9.

²⁵Sen, *Identity and Violence*, 9.

be dialogue, intelligibility, communication, growth etc. if differences are not essential to things. For example, a man and a woman are different, as such complement each other (as a matter of fact, two men are also very different in another way, which is necessary yet not a ground for inhumane rivalry).

Ethnic Diversity: Why Is It a Problem?

There are certain concepts that are relevant to understanding the problem associated with ethnic diversity, namely, attention, opponent process and adversarial process. According to Richard Tanas, “our world view is not simply the way we look at the world ...²⁶ world views create worlds.” For Henry Thoreau, “the question is not what you look at, but what you see.”²⁷ These quotes introduced the work of Iain McGilchrist, “The Matter with Things”, in which he intelligently examined the role of attention in life. According to him, there are two ways of attending to the world, one is very narrow, and the other more open. It has something to do with how our brains are divided into two hemispheres.²⁸

The first type of attention is the left hemisphere's type of attention, which specializes in targeted precise and rigid attention; this is the hemisphere that bifurcates and decontextualizes reality. While the second type is the right hemisphere's way of attending, which is a broader and more vigilant type of attention that sustains the being of the world, and affords context for meaningful experiences.²⁹ Using the myth of the master and his emissary, McGilchrist in his seminal work “The Master and His Emissary,” explained that the right hemisphere is the master while the left the emissary. The master knows it needs the emissary for administrative functions that needs precise grasp of things that could be identified, which it cannot engage in; however, the left does not see the relevance of the master. He believes he knows what is there to be known and that is it. The left dispenses of context but abstracts things into defined categories.³⁰

In the context of the divided brain, we have come to understand that both the right and left hemisphere have their proper place and function. In fact, John Vervaeke in a podcast explained that both are necessary for insight.³¹ This means both the type of attention that bifurcates reality and the one that harmonizes it are relevant. This gives us an insight into properly understanding the source of the exclusivist mindset or way of attending, namely, the left hemisphere. Fundamentally, there is

²⁶Sen, Identity and Violence, 9.

²⁷Iain McGilchrist, *The Matter with Things: Our Brains, Our Delusions and the Unmaking of the World* (London: Perspectiva Press, 2021), 98.

²⁸McGilchrist, *The Matter with Things*, 98.

²⁹McGilchrist, *The Matter with Things*, 98.

³⁰Jordan Peterson and Iain McGilchrist, “A Brain Divided,” (Jordan B. Peterson's Podcast Series, Episode 168, published May 13, 2021), accessed December 01, 2023, <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=0Zld-MX11IA&pp=ygUkVGVhIIGRpdmlkZWQgYnJhaW4gYnkgSm9yGFulHBldGVyc29u>.

³¹John Vervaeke and Eric Orwoll, “Relationship and Ground of Being: Understanding Platonism,” (The Meditation Philosopher Podcast, published February 29, 2024), accessed February 28, 2024, <https://m.youtube.com/@TheMeditatingPhilosopher>.

nothing wrong with any of the hemisphere's view of the world, since we cannot function properly as humans without both. For example, we must make decisions within our ambivalences and polarizations only through the left hemisphere's interventions. What is important is to let the right hemisphere be the master in our way of attending to the world. When the right hemisphere leads, our actions and decisions become more meaningful.

Moreover, if it is taken seriously, as established earlier, that relationality does not deny essential differences, then we have reason to question any ontological system that has no place for exclusion (the function of the left hemisphere). Exclusion explains the differences that manifest in reality while not denying ontological relations. For example, protein is really different from water, this is because the intelligible content of water excludes that of protein, yet, protein cannot be intelligible if it is not in relation to other things that it excludes. Furthermore, we can say that a working political system must attempt to exclude corruption in order to maintain its operative power. All this shows that the left hemisphere's way of attending to reality is in consonance with the way being manifests itself. In essence, the two ways of attending discussed here are in tandem with reality which is one-many, that is, entities are relational yet essentially different.

Regarding opponent process, it is a theory first postulated by Edwald Hering a German Physiologist as a complementary theory³² to the trichromatic theory (developed by Thomas Young and Hermann Helmholtz) and explanation for the mechanism of colour perception.³³ It has become a relevant theory adopted by various fields to explain various phenomena. Richard L. Solomon and John D. Corbit, American psychologists adopted Hering's presentation of the opponent process theory into the field of psychology, to explain how the primary or initial reaction to an emotional event will be subsequently followed by an opposite emotional state.³⁴ The opponent process should be seen as a pattern of relations that leads to homeostasis, that is, internal stability for a system despite external influences. It presupposes the idea that relations are essential to becoming and becoming is a form of processing. According to Vervaeke, opponent processing is the way that human biology, human cognition and the world manifest. Commenting on bi-hemispheric division of the brain, he opines that its true functionality is dependent on opponent processing. The left directs attention for well-defined problems, looking for detail, certainty and clarity, while the right opens the path for a gestalt or formation within which problems become related to many other problems. In essence, the left and right hemispheres engage in

³²Charlotte Nicherson, "The Trichromatic Theory of Color Vision," last updated October 26, 2023, accessed June 05, 2024, <https://www.simplypsychology.org/what-is-the-trichromatic-theory-of-color-vision.html>.

³³Nicherson, "The Trichromatic Theory of Color Vision."

³⁴Charlotte Nicherson, "Opponent Process Theory of Emotion and Motivational States," last updated November 09, 2023, accessed June 05, 2024, <https://www.simplypsychology.org/opponent-process-theory.html>.

Furthermore in discussing the workings of the brain he said,

With its self-organizing criticality, the brain engages in a kind of ongoing opponent processing between integration and differentiation of information processing. This means that the brain is constantly complexifying its processing, simultaneously integrating as a system while differentiating component parts. In this way, the brain is continually adapting to a dynamically complex environment. One important property of such self-complexification in any system is that it results in emergent functions and abilities for that system.³⁶

One would hardly miss, at this point, the emphasis on opponent processing in explaining natural phenomena. When one takes seriously, Vervaeke's emphasis of how the human intellect participate in the form or pattern as the entire cosmos, it becomes clear how opponent processing is the pattern of the cosmos and the human intellect and cognition.³⁷ But how does all these, feature in explaining the problem of ethnic diversity. The human mind/cognition is intentional.³⁸ As such, it has a certain freedom as regards how it attends to the world. For Vervaeke, when the human cognition is not able to attend to reality, and participate in its real form as an opponent process, it is because it adopts a different mechanism known as parasitic or adversarial processing.³⁹

According to Vervaeke, when humans do not engage in what he called, “dialogos” (reciprocal participation in intelligibility) then human cognition would develop a mechanism that is the opposite of opponent processing. Instead, of seeing the other as a necessary opponent with whom our self-realization and development depends, the other is seen as an adversary that must be annihilated.⁴⁰ Jonathan Pageau commented on this when he opined that through fixation on our identities, we lose our relationality.⁴¹ This brings us back to the quote by Richard Tanas, “our world view is not simply the way we look at the world ... world views create worlds.”⁴² As such, 'as a man is, so he sees.'⁴³ In this sense, ethnic diversity manifest as a human problem, because, of adversarial processing. Our relationship with our ethnic group identity and the other is one of

³⁵John Vervaeke and Jonathan Pageau, “Dr. John Vervaeke and Jonathan Pageau in Dialectic” (Video by Urban Abbey, Consciousness and Conscience Podcast, October 10, 2022), accessed June 05, 2024, <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=nxIMW1ddaes&t=32s>.

³⁶Vervaeke, “Dr. John Vervaeke and Jonathan Pageau in Dialectic.”

³⁷William F. Lawhead, *The Voyage of Discovery: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy*, 4th ed. (Stampford, USA: Cengage Learning, 2015), 530-531.

³⁸Vervaeke, “Relevance, Meaning and the Cognitive Science of Wisdom,”³⁴.

³⁹Vervaeke, “Dr. John Vervaeke and Jonathan Pageau in Dialectic.”

⁴⁰Vervaeke, “Dr. John Vervaeke and Jonathan Pageau in Dialectic.”

⁴¹McGilchrist, *The Matter with Things*,⁹⁸. 110

⁴²McGilchrist, *The Matter with Things*,⁹⁸.

⁴³McGilchrist, *The Matter with Things*,⁹⁸.

adversarial processing due to the sort of cognitive mechanism we have built over time. This is no mere speculation, but is grounded by scientific findings about human cognition and relationship, as presented above.

Ethnic Diversity And Human Cognition

According to William Blake, 'As a man is, so he sees.'⁴⁴ John Vervaeke in one of his YouTube lectures discussed what he called the agent-arena relationship. An arena is a place that is organized in such a way that you know how to act in it. It makes sense to you, you know where things belong, what actions are appropriate, how to be involved and interact. In other words, you have conformed to the arena. An agent on the other hand, is one who is able to pursue goals, organize cognition and behaviour so that action fits the situation and environment. In other words, an agent is one who is able to conform to an arena, and engage in a coupling or a process of co-identification. In this light, agents assume an agent-identity and assign an arena-identity; and this process of co-identification is known as an existential mode of being. Without this process acting in the world is impossible. This entire process is also referred to as worldview attunement.⁴⁵ This way of viewing the world and human action, implies that when we assign an identity to an arena, we simultaneously assign identities to other agents in that arena. This means that our relationship with others depends on how we identify them within our arena. We could either see them as opponents with whom we are in dialogical relationship of self-realization, or as adversaries whom we must annihilate in order to realize ourselves and our place in the world. The former is opponent processing and the later adversarial processing. This means that when we are able to co-identify in using the cognitive mechanism of opponent processing then we have a worldview attunement that affords our meaning making project of self-realization. When this is not the case, what is obtainable is an existential confusion; since, adversarial processing only affords a destructive relationship, where annihilation of the other is the goal.

Let us go a step further and consider two important cognitive processes that will afford a path to resolving the problem of ethnic diversity. Our cognitive processes afford our being able to participate in a form of self-deception, namely, reciprocal narrowing in which our cognitive flexibility narrows at the same time as the world narrows before us. Although initially developed to explain the phenomena of Alcohol addiction, reciprocal narrowing goes beyond that, to explaining how our cognitive scope narrows with the world due to the mechanism of parasitic or adversarial processing that informs our cognition.⁴⁶ In other words, the agent and

⁴⁴John Vervaeke, "Awakening from the Meaning Crisis: Aristotle's World View and Erich Fromm" (John Vervaeke Podcast Ep. 7, published March 01, 2019), accessed June 05, 2024, <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=yy47YzvGniQ&t=281s>.

⁴⁵John Vervaeke, "John Vervaeke on Reciprocal Narrowing" (Riley Clarke Channel, Published November 12, 2021), accessed June 05, 2024, <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=GoBR3BPfoNo>.

the arena reciprocally narrow. When we bring this to understanding human relationship, we would note that, the mechanism of adversarial processing narrows our cognitive flexibility, that is, it narrows how we see ourselves and others. In other words, we do not participate cognitively in the pattern of reality, leading to a form of foolishness that informs how we relate with others. Vervaeke gave an example with democracy. He said, we can only practice true democracy when we participate in the pattern of reality, that is, as opponent processing rather than adversarial processing. In other words, opposing political wings, say the left and right, should co-identify themselves and engage in a form of dialogue that adopt the cognitive mechanism of opponent processing.⁴⁷ When this happens, the state grows due to the productive nature of opponent processing. As a solution to reciprocal narrowing, Vervaeke proposed what he called “reciprocal opening”, a process in which cognitive flexibility is enhanced and affordance landscape is opened. This means the agent and the arena reciprocally open, to enhance proper relationship or acting in the world. This is the same thing as love, an existential mode of being in the world, where the agent and the arena reciprocally open and action becomes appropriate and mutually enhancing.⁴⁸

It has been established above that when we assume an agent-identity, it is always in relation to an arena. For example, when I assume the identity of a specific ethnic group, say Jju, it is in relation to the ethnic socio-political arena. In this vein, when I do not assign the identity of opponents to other agents in the arena, they become adversaries. When this happens, agent-arena relationship is not mutually enhancing but mutually destructive. In other words, if my co-identification with that ethnic group does not open me to properly relating with other agents within the ethnic arena, then I am in the processing of reciprocally narrowing with that arena. Put simply, this work argues that the process of worldview attunement or agent-arena relationship of co-identification is a necessary existential mode of being in the world with others. Without this agent-arena relationship, acting in the world is impossible. However, our cognitive flexibility determines whether our worldview attunement, affords us acting in a way that fosters mutual enhancement and self-realization. Human cognition has two mechanisms that affords agent-arena relationship, namely, opponent processing or adversarial processing. When our way of attending to the world is that of opponent processing then agent-arena relationship will reciprocally open, affording mutual enhancement. Nevertheless, when we adopt the mechanism of adversarial processing then our agent-arena relationship would reciprocally narrow, affording mutual destruction/annihilation. This shows that, the problem of ethnic diversity is manifest due to the cognitive mechanism that affords our agent-arena relation.

⁴⁶Vervaeke, “Dr. John Vervaeke and Jonathan Pageau in Dialectic.”

⁴⁷Vervaeke, “Awakening from the Meaning Crisis: Aristotle's World View and Erich Fromm.”

The Ultimate Imperative

The title of this section appears strange at first glance. It raises a sense of wonder in regards to what the ultimate imperative could be. It is evident at this point, that this work has established the indispensability of differences, specifically, ethnic differences or diversity. Sequel to this, it has also shown how the manifest problem of ethnic diversity does not lie in the differences themselves but on how cognitive agents process the differences. In this vein, it shows that adopting a negative impacting mechanism like adversarial processing, which reciprocally narrows our cognitive flexibility and how we see the world, resulting in a mutually destructive relationship and behaviour. It generally narrows how we view ourselves and reality, and even how we act in the world.

The ultimate imperative then is this, “do not let the agent-arena relation be a passive process, but be intentionally engaged in the process”. This means that, as cognitive agents we have one option in order to solve the problem that arise from ethnic diversity. It is not just to engage in cultural sharing, nor is it just to engage in dialogue hoping to have good results. It is not also to propose a form of homogeneity that might indispensably manifest as the privileging of one ethnic group over the other. Instead, it is to focus on the cognitive mechanism that affords our relationship in the world. It must be an intentional process and not an accidental one. For example, when a football player who has a worldview attunement that has adopted the opponent process, that makes him reciprocally open to the football arena, he would inevitably see his opponents as a necessary opportunity to be a football player. It means he consciously knows that he must have opponents in order to be a football player, and a good one at that.

However, when his agent-arena relationship is reciprocally narrow, his opponents become adversaries, and this results in a lot of unruly behaviours even in the act of playing the ball. It does not give room for mutual enhancement or cultivation of character. This is what should be avoided at all cost, if the problem of processing differences (especially ethnic differences) would be resolved.

Evaluation

It should be taken seriously that, the method of analysis presented here is not limited to discussing the problem of ethnic diversity. Its applicative power is evidently large. This means that further research could be done in order to develop it. In the same vein, it can be adopted as a philosophical method of analysis. It could be adopted in discussing philosophical problems within the socio-political landscape, the moral landscape, the socio-economic landscape, ecosophy etc.

Conclusion

This work has established the indispensability of differences, especially ethnic differences or diversity. It has also shown how the manifest problem of ethnic diversity does not lie in the differences themselves but on how we cognitive agents process the differences. In this vein, it shows that adopting a negative impacting mechanism like adversarial processing, which reciprocally narrow our

cognitive flexibility and how we see the world, result in a mutually destructive relationship and behaviour. It generally narrows how we view ourselves and reality, and even how we act in the world. This raises the question of how we could attend to the problem and get positive results. By way of proposal, this work emphasized the indispensability of developing the cognitive mechanism of opponent processing that affords our agent-arena relationship to reciprocally open, thereby, affording mutual enhancement.

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