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AMBIVALENCE OF HUMAN EXISTENTIAL SITUATION AS AN INDEX OF RATIONAL EXPLANATION

BY

CHRIS O. AKPAN

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Abstract

Man in spite of his rationality often tend to do things that also negate the interest he at the same time attempts to conserve. His entire existence is beset by this phenomenon of ambivalence. Models of explanation like the positivist and realist models, usually employed to give rational explanation on human social action have failed to make recourse to this phenomenon. Their logic of explanation is more or less restrictive and lopsided in the sense that reality, for them, is limited either to observable phenomena or their underlying structures from which the observable emanates. In this exclusivist – disjunctive reasoning, they cannot claim to explain fundamentally. In this paper, we argue that to give rational explanation about man's social behaviour demands taking the human ambivalent situation into consideration. This measure will give us the leverage to understand that reality though a complex phenomenon with diverse components could better be appreciated in a complementary way. We submit that such understanding could only be provided via "complementary reflection", an approach which is non-exclusivist in character.

Introduction

No one in his right senses would argue that man does not belong to the animal kingdom. Yet unlike other animals, his high level of rationality, perhaps more than anything else, stands him out. In his day to day interaction with other members (men) of his society, man with his rationality, does not cease from pursuing his interest (and perhaps that of his colleagues) which is screened by the natural tendency of self-preservation: a tendency which ironically, is shared by other lesser animals with no rationality. These interests may be political, social, economic, religious, scientific, etc.

In all these categories, the human existential situation, of course, demands that man cannot do without seeking and defending the interests accruing from them. Such interests, it is often taken for granted, are mainly for the enhancement of man's place in nature, which he spares little or no energy to conquer. Thus man's pursuit of interest in the world he lives is often mistakenly seen as positive in so far as he achieves his aim.

What appears to be elusive to our consciousness is that this pursuit of interests is, to put it metaphorically, a double-edged sword whose one side may be blunt and the other, sharp. By this, we mean that human interests have double capacity which more often than not, are conflicting, portraying negativity

and positivity at the same time. Professor Asouzu painstakingly and vividly captures this phenomenon as “the ambivalence of human situation” (Effective, 5ff; Method, 61 ff).

The irony is that as highly rational animals that we are, we have often either failed to decode this phenomenon or feigned ignorance of it, or more still, tend to take it as normal with impunity. Yet the damage or punishment that this phenomenon has offered us is already enormous! More ironical is the fact that models of explanation, especially in the social sciences whose subject matter is human social action, have ever been busy explaining, describing and distinguishing what constitute rational action as against irrational action without any recourse to this phenomenon.

This essay, in view of such problematic, is an attempt to argue that any model of explanation in so far as it is concerned with man, his action and interaction in the society that does not take this phenomenon into consideration is defective. Our submission is that understanding the ambivalence of human existential situation provides the measures towards any rational explanation, and that “complementary reflection” provides a better model to understanding this primordial phenomenon.

An Exposition on the Notion of Ambivalence of Human Existential Situation

Man is a complex being, 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 tendency shared even by other beings: 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 problems 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” (Method, 52).

What the above means is that self-preservation has been man’s preoccupation right from the time of Adam. And it is through this primeval interest that man can make meaning about his life. This primeval interest, however, actually divulges itself into several other existential interests that adorn man’s whole existence. Thus, human actions, whether individually carried out or collectively performed are more often than not influenced by this interest. The implication here is that self-preservation and its concomitant interests are not tendencies that are bad in themselves. The problem, however, is exposed when we critically examine the intrigues that characterize such interests and the intricate aims human beings associate with such pursuits.

Professor Asouzu in his books, *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* has taken time to explain the phenomenon of ambivalence of human interest with some mind-throbbing concrete examples. Thus there seems 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” (5). What this means is that in the course of pursuing our interest, we most time would believe that what we are pursuing is something positive; something which may be beneficial to us, without knowing that on the other side of the coin, what we will achieve at the same time is negative. This is to say that we are often being misled by our shallow, parochial and quasi insightful drives towards what we think is positive only to achieve what in the final analysis would be negative. This tendency is the root cause of social disorder, crisis, distrust and lack of our development as humans, state, nation and continent respectively.

Asouzu correctly 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 process end up by losing whatever interest he was trying to conserve. (15-16). Instances that can explain such paradoxicalities abound especially in Nigeria (Africa). 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 victim(s)? Why should somebody dare into a gold-mine which has been prohibited by the authority as being dangerous, knowing quite well that he may not come out safe? 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? Why do people vandalize, connect, disconnect and even de-connect high-tension and low-tension electric cables illegally without fear of being electrocuted to death? Most important, if they do not think of the immediate dangers to themselves, why don't they think of how their selfish interests would negatively affect the common good?

Most ironical is the fact that many people would detect so many things as being wrong yet they would not help going ahead to do those things that they have detected as wrong. On top of that, they may even proffer wonderful solutions to these problems, yet they will not implement these solutions: the solutions ending up only on paper!

In Asouzu's words, "We are confronted with a situation where people often choose to do those things they abhor and criticize" (21). To a large extent, some people especially the elites or what Nigerians call "leaders of thought and political leaders," have tended to project these paradoxical and contradictory ways of perceiving reality into a general law (21). In other words, our so called leaders have made uncanny efforts to project and accept abnormalities as being normal and to that extent it does not matter to them if it could be generally accepted as a paradigm.

So many "why questions" as raised above on this paradoxical phenomenon need answers. The all-embracing answer as given by Asouzu is that the ambivalence of human interest has rather blurred our views, forcing us to "see only the short term or ad hoc benefits of our policies and not their dangers on the long run" (29). This, of course, is true because human interest is intricately interwoven. It is not homogeneous. Thus, failure to understand what we need authentically would always lead us into error of getting at, or pursuing what we do not authentically need and this will lead us into self-contradiction. He makes the point that our interests, since they are not homogeneous, "can easily conceal an aspect of their ambivalent dimension and this can lead to all sorts of mistakes" (Method, 61). This phenomenon of concealment, would force our drives towards certain interest which are rather deceptive in nature.

The fundamental question then is, how do we get ourselves liberated from this phenomenon? How do we escape being destroyed by this tendency? Professor Asouzu makes it clear that we can free ourselves from this 'tyranny' "only if we make concerted conscious efforts to be aware of their devastating effect (62). This means that we are not usually conscious of the dangers inherent in some of the interest we pursue. If we were, then we would know the correct avenue of how to go about realizing them. According to him, "if we were fully aware of the dangers associated with the ambivalence of our interests, we would certainly not sign our own death warrant; we would vehemently resist those things that would complicate matters later and put us into trouble" (Effective, 6).

But on a more critical note, do we really say that human beings are not sometimes aware or conscious of the dangers that lie in-wait as consequence when they take certain actions? For instance, is the suicide bomber entirely unaware of the fact that taking his life or that of other fellow human beings is wrong? Is the pipe-line vandal not aware of the danger he is open to in his business of scooping fuel illegally? Even before he ventures into the business, his mind is always cut between two possible alternatives - life and death! Yet he would ignore that inner voice which keeps warning him: 'that something terrible could happen'. He would ignore that sub-conscious power which reminds him that the action he would want to delve into will not augur well nor promote the common good.

It appears therefore, that Professor Asouzu's remark that "if we were fully aware of the dangers associated with the ambivalence of our interests we would not sign our own death warrant..." (16), is similar to identifying knowledge with virtue. Inyang in his "Social Engineering and Ambivalence of Human Interest: The Nigerian Experience" correctly makes the point that Professor Asouzu's position may not be far from Socrates' teaching that "knowledge is virtue and vice is attributed to ignorance of that which is good" (88). But he seems to agree totally with Asouzu's position that if we were aware of the danger of our actions we would not do it, for no man who really knows what is wrong would do it.

But this position is open to the same criticism leveled against Socrates' identification of "knowledge with virtue" by Aristotle. Aristotle is said to have pointed out that Socrates may have forgotten the influence of the irrational part of the soul and did not take sufficient notice of the fact of moral weakness which leads man to do what he knows to be wrong (Copleston 109). We cannot in all honesty say, for

instance, that criminals are totally ignorant people. They are people who most times have deep conviction within them that what they are doing is utterly wrong and devilish and yet would choose to do it. This does not seem to mean that they are unaware of the evil associated with their actions or that if they were aware they would not do it. The problem appears to lie in their moral weakness which is induced when the irrational part in them subjugates the rational part. Asouzu even makes the point that the natural urge of self-preservation which influences human actions is not a purely rational one, hence we do at times make recourse to questionable means that we wrongly perceive as good (Method, 60).

Be that as it may, what is significant about this phenomenon of human existential situation is that it is something that is natural. It is only when we fail to manage it successfully that we tend to act paradoxically. Asouzu has propounded two basic principles of complementarity on how to manage this natural phenomenon that beset human life. These, according to him, are:

- i. The principle of harmonious complementation, and
- ii. The principle of progressive transformation.

The first principle states: "Anything that exists serves a missing link of reality" (Effective 58). By this, it is meant that all realities are composed of diverse components or segments. The segments, if viewed singly or in isolation from the others would be meaningless and for that reason they are missing in relation to the other. For any reality 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. Relating human social actions to this principle, it would mean that both the positive acts and the negative acts that are part of human existence should be harmoniously and mutually related such that each act serves the other in a complementary way. In this way, the negative act when linked up to its other (the positive act), would be transformed positively. This hitherto negative act which has now turned positive since it has found its missing component can become a source of joy for those who perform them. This principle has a touch of Aristotle's idea that nature abhors vacuum and would not make anything in vain. Hence everything has a natural tendency towards its end. In this vein, Asouzu adds the point 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" (60).

The demand of this principle is that we should allow the limitation of being to be the cause of joy. What this means is that we should accept our limitations and finality as humans, while making efforts to see these as conditions through which we can achieve higher level of legitimization. It is only when we gain this higher level of legitimization that our struggle and interest in the society could have authentic meaning. In his "Redefining Ethnicity within the Complementary System of thought in African Philosophy", he explains "limitation of being" to mean "the capacity to view and accept all stakeholders in their relativity and insufficiency and the help and services rendered to them as part of the joy intended in one's own action" (77).

Professor Asouzu's idea here is a plea for tolerance and deep understanding of the 'facticity' of the human situation as an imperfect one. To promote a cordial relationship and interaction, we have to integrate what we think are wrong actions, carried out sometimes unintentionally, with the positive actions, hoping that the positive actions would transform the negative acts and this will then lead to the joy of our being.

Ambivalence of Human Existential Situation and the Quest for Rational Explanation

Having explained the notion of ambivalence of human existential situation, the task here is to show that this phenomenon is both a veritable and indispensable index of rational explanation for human social actions.

The question that looms large is, what is rational explanation? In answering this question it will be pertinent we dig briefly into the concept of rationality. The concept 'rationality', ordinarily is a derivative of the word reason. It entails the procedure of making and adopting beliefs, opinions, ideas, etc, on the basis of appropriate reason. In this wise, one must be seen to be capable of making decision and judgment based on appropriate reason rather than emotion or arbitrary choice before he could be said to be rational.

Meanwhile, we should note that the adjective 'rational' is used to characterize man (the agent) and man's specific beliefs, opinions or knowledge claims or actions. In both of these cases, rationality can be

contrasted with either non-rationality or irrationality (Brown 744). A non-living thing, a stone or wood, for example, is not capable of any rational assessment and as such is non-rational. A being who is capable of carrying out rational assessment but who regularly violates the principles of rational assessment is irrational.

Aristotle is said to be the first person to have declared that rationality is the essential feature that distinguishes human beings from every other animals, thus man by nature according to him, is rational. The influence of Aristotle on the entire history of philosophy need not be recapped here but suffice it to remind us that he is the one who formalized and systematized all forms of human thinking and this culminated in the subject called logic. From then on most philosophers have emphasized that rational assessment or explanation requires rigorous rules of logic for deciding whether a belief, an opinion or an action should be accepted as rational or not. The rules of logic, according to these philosophers, apply to every man irrespective of his cultural background or world-view. Thus the idea of rationality had since become central to the tradition of Western philosophy; and as pointed out by J. B. Thomson, "it became definitive of philosophy itself" (279).

The rise of modern science in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries gave additional impetus to this technical conception of rationality. Thomson notes that: With the rise of the positive science, philosophy lost its pretension to provide a rational explanation of the phenomena which constitute the world. The alleged autonomy and self-sufficiency of philosophy was destroyed; thenceforth, philosophy could continue to explore the theme of rationality only in conjunction with the sciences of nature, of language, of society (279).

What this implies is that logic which is part of philosophy and the method of science both became the paradigm of rational explanation. More succinctly, the scientific method, which provides the rules for gathering evidence and evaluating hypothesis on the basis of such evidence, and the fixed and universal principles of logic combined, sort of, to become the paradigm method for any form of knowledge (including the human sciences) wishing to be regarded as rational. Thus any form of knowledge, beliefs, traditions and even human actions that did not conform to this paradigm was irrational. This, of course, was the prevailing attitude that made the positivists, the falsificationists and the like to attempt to demarcate science from non-science. This is why, according to Aronowitz, "'rationality' itself becomes inextricably linked to domination" (317). Indeed, rationality became ideologized, and to that extent turned into a tool for the suppression and hegemonization of cultures and forms of knowledge believed to be under-developed and second-rated respectively.

Feyerabend made allusion to this conception of rationality as having originated in Greece and later spread on to the sciences (Farewell, 73). He attributed this conception of rationality to those he classified as "the founders of Western culture", which, according to him, included "Aristotle, Descartes, Newton, Kant, Russell, Popper and Lakatos" (Rationalism, 9). Feyerabend said that Western tradition has been influenced by the idea of rationality peddled by these people. He said that for them, a view or an idea is rational only if it emerges from the application of the procedures, rules, standards, that have been set out by them (8). In this wise one becomes rational, if and only if one's actions or beliefs can conform to these general rules and standards.

This logo-centric – scientific paradigm has had a firm grip on many models of explanation towards explaining natural phenomena and in fact, human social behaviour. But the question is, to what extent have these models of explanation succeeded in explaining, especially human actions rationally. To put it more firmly, what does it mean to give rational explanation about man's social action? Man may be part of the natural order of things in the world: A world which science attempts to explain rationally. This does not mean that everything about man could as well be subjected to rational study and dispassionate investigation by deductive or inductive reason and/ or the scientific method as if he were an inanimate object or a lesser being. Man with his complex nature characterized by his intention, beliefs, values, aspirations, and most important his interest and the natural instinct of self-preservation can render the logo-centric – scientific method, especially as peddled by the positivists, questionable. Michael Lesnoff argues strongly that the model of natural science "is inapplicable in the social sciences because the existence of social facts always implies the existence of mental state – intentions, purposes, beliefs, expectations, and awareness of rules –

which are not observable by empirical methods (188). Any study of man, therefore, has to take into consideration the human existential situation which, of course, is influenced by the ambivalent nature of his interest.

Models of explanation like the positivists model of explanation (confirmationist and the falsificationist approaches), often couched in the garb of inductive and deductive logic respectively, and to some extent the realist model, have failed to take this phenomenon into consideration when employed to explain human social action. Basically, both the positivist and the realist models of explanation have been observed to be limited and insufficient in their approach to explanation of reality. To be sure, the positivist model hinges on the idea of subsuming whatever phenomenon to be explained under some kind of general law, which according to the positivist is made possible by the regularity of events observed in nature. The model simply conceives of reality as merely phenomenal or as simply made up of only observable entities. Thus whatever is not observable or that cannot fit into the scheme of the general law is unscientific and therefore should be discarded. General Law, it is argued, is the fulcrum that gives science its impetus of predicting events. Predictability thus becomes a fundamental feature that distinguishes what is scientific and rational from that which is unscientific and irrational.

A critical look at the positivist model shows that it applies the exclusivist – disjunctive kind of reasoning. But this poses a big problem to the positivist because reality is complex and not merely phenomenal. With this exclusivist approach, the model cannot claim to give any authentic explanation which could capture reality in its totality. It is therefore defective and lopsided in its attempts to explain reality.

On the other hand, the realist position on explanation is that an authentic causal explanation of event could only be achieved if we strive to uncover and understand the underlying structures, the operative mechanisms and their inter-relationship that give rise to phenomena. William Outhwaite puts it this way: “Realists by contrast (to the positivists) analyze causality in terms of the nature of things and their interactions, their causal power (and liabilities). The guiding metaphors here are those of structures and mechanisms in reality, rather than phenomena and events” (22). In this wise, a rational explanation is attained only if we go beyond the phenomenal or the observable to the underlying structures or essences which are believed to be the cause of the phenomena we seek to explain.

This model on face value may appear to be better than the positivist model in the sense that it does not seem to limit reality to the observable entities. But like the positivist model, it has serious limitation which is in its over-emphasis on the essences or underlying structures as if the phenomenal do not count much. Thus in its approach, the model appears to divorce the “real” from the “appearances” as if they have no mutual relationship. In this sense, the realist model is simply too restrictive and suffers the same fate of being lopsided in its attempt to explain reality.

The two models on the whole, do not seem to bother about taking the different strands and components of reality into consideration in a complementary manner. This problem is what Asouzu’s complementary approach seeks to overcome. We shall return to this soon.

Meanwhile, it is pertinent to also note that in their quest for criteria to determine what type of action is rational, acceptable and scientific, these models of explanation have tended to detach the problem of rationality from the existential conditions of man which is ambivalent. Influenced by the scientific paradigm, these models claim that explanation could be done on the basis of humanly detached evidence. Quoting Ernest Gellner, Jacob Aigbodioh captures this picture of science thus: “the salient features of scientific knowledge is that its explanatory schemata are impersonal, indifferent to idiosyncrasy and identity, and articulated in terms which are socially and morally blind, and which are, indeed, generally unintelligent without specialized and technical training” (19).

The point here is that this ‘scientism’ when applied to human social situation, seems to detach the issue of what factors are responsible for the actions or the existence of the social agent from the explanatory schemata. The result of such explanatory models would always be lopsided and defective. This is why Feyerabend argues that any ‘rational’ procedure or ‘valid’ standard that runs counter to sociological and psychological tendencies, and that does not belong to any tradition is hopeless (Rationalism, 14). Ozumba seems to also support this position when he argues that “the abstract rationalistic aspect of epistemology

(scientific knowledge) should be decoded and made to have bearing on human concrete existential situation.” (Ozumba 17).

Now if human existential situation is guided and influenced by that primordial interest – self-preservation, and since this interest in its diverse ways is not homogenous nor entirely rational, then any rational explanation about man must take this phenomenon into consideration. Thus, to give rational explanation about man as a social animal is not to detach this phenomenon from the logic of explanation – making logic or scientific paradigm to dwell in a realm that cannot be brought down to bear on human existential situation.

Apart from social scientists employing the paradigm of science and logic to attempt to give rational explanation on human actions, each social participant (to use Michael Root’s term) does not seem to be bereft of ideas on how to explain his actions rationally. For example, ask any social participant why he chooses to break the pipe line or disconnect/reconnect the electric cables to suit his own fancy, or why he evades payment of tax, or why he ‘sorts’ to pass examinations or gain employment, or any favour, he will line out what appears to be very cogent and persuasive reasons – reasons that ‘caused’ him to engage in such actions. His reasons may range from negligence by government, unemployment, injustice, inequality, marginalization, favoritism to the ‘man no man syndrome’ and the like. The reasons he gives may appear to explain his actions. To this extent, he may also be said to give a rational explanation of the causes of his actions. Rational explanation in this sense would mean citing an intention that is the cause of the behaviour, and describing the behaviour with some amount of reasonableness. The reasons cited usually would include beliefs, desires, interests, etc, and these, of course, are meant to show that what he did was the reasonable thing to have done in the circumstances.

But the question that social scientists usually pose is, does such ‘lay man’ explanation correctly explain participants’ behaviour? Some social scientists do come to the conclusion that participants’ account of what cause their behaviors is insincere and thus certain things are hidden. To that extent, social scientists discount participants account because they “believe the participant is self-deceived and is hiding from herself the cause of her behaviour” (Root 176). This explains why many social scientists put aside or look beyond participants accounts because the belief is that such accounts do not explain enough or fundamentally.

This is what Asouzu seems to tell us when he argues strongly that to explain ambivalent human acts like violence, graft, corruption, etc., on the basis of such other acts, as injustice, oppression, nepotism or even colonialism, etc. would amount to begging the question. He makes it clear that such ‘causal explanation’ is only touching the symptoms not the root cause of the disease. This of course, is the kind of explanation given by the layman. To give an adequate causal explanation demands that we “take the relative historical conditions of the individual into account and still be insightful. The explanation must go beyond known empirical effects but has to consider them” (Method 231). The explanatory task, according to him, is to explain the most fundamental cause why people engage in acts that are ambivalent, acts that are awkwardly paradoxical. And the most appropriate approach of explanation, it seems, is the complementary approach which we mentioned in the last section of this work.

A thorough look at Asouzu’s complementary approach to explaining reality shows that his approach has the capacity to overcome the limitations of the positivist and realist models of explanation; models that are purely exclusivist in nature. The complementary approach is a non-exclusivist model which seeks to establish the basic relationship that makes an event possible. It seeks to understand all events, first in their historical and relative fragmentation and then in their ultimate relationship to the totality.

This approach, anchored on the methodological principles of “harmonious complementation” and “progressive transformation”, is a call for every scientist and social inquirer to learn to view each component of reality as being meaningful only when understood in relation to other components. In this sense, we will learn to accept all diverse components in their relativity and insufficiency, but with a conviction that they can be mutually complemented; that is, if we have to achieve an authentic understanding of their nature. Following such an illuminative approach, it would be seen that all models that are restrictive in their explanation of reality are non-complementary. And all non-complementary

models are models that are incapable of explaining the phenomenon of ambivalence that beset human existence.

The bottom line of our discourse above is that any model of explanation wishing to explain the actions of that rational being (man) must go beyond the outward manifestations of man's actions or behaviours to the fundamental causes which is the human primordial interest (self-preservation), which is not entirely rational because of its ambivalence nature. We must however, in doing this, still be insightful of the outward actions by assimilating them in a complementary way. This then is what the complementary approach does better than the other models of explanation.

The Significance of Ambivalence of Human Situation as an Index of Rational Explanation

Our attempt here is to show the significance that accrues from understanding or being conscious of the phenomenon of ambivalence: A phenomenon that underlies human actions. Understanding this phenomenon is the measure for any rational explanation.

Given the fact that man is not entirely rational, for he can act irrationally at times: and given that it would be pretty difficult to mark and maintain a precise boundary between rationality and irrationality, for an act can be rational now and irrational in another sense or another moment (Boudon 4), the best way to explain human action 'rationally' is to understand this phenomenon of ambivalence.

Understanding this phenomenon would mean that we must be at alert always, for one who is alert will know when the irrational part of him attempts to subjugate the rational part, especially with regard to taking actions which concerns himself and which may have immediate or later effect on others.

Let us explain this with the illustration of those individuals and groups who evade payment of taxes to the appropriate bodies. Some individuals will give 'rational explanation' that government has not justified the monies that accrue from taxes, that government has not provided enough social amenities that is commensurate with the taxes they collect, and so on. Hence, they conclude, there is no need to pay taxes again. On face value, the reasons they give as the cause of their refusing to pay taxes make their argument rational, for after all, if government involves reciprocity between it and the citizen with respect to observance of rules (Fuller 188), then the government should justify the taxes paid by providing these amenities, that is, if the citizens are to continue obeying the rules covering tax payments.

But on a more critical look many people because of self-interest would not ordinarily want to part with their money for their belief is that government should take care of them. The question is, how many people would pay their taxes willingly if government do not remove from their sources or mount road blocks or go to houses in order to force people to comply? In Nigeria in particular, it is doubtful if many people will willingly pay taxes. This is a sharp contrast to what obtains in some other countries where the citizens even beg government to increase their taxes.

Refusing to pay taxes, on the other hand, is irrational because it breaches a provision of the constitution of the country (we can call it a standard of rationality) which mandates every adult to pay taxes. Now the individual or group who evades payment of taxes may think that he has gained something positive by saving his money but on the other side, his action will present something negative about him as a social animal and to his community. Suppose his action expressed in the proposition 'there is no need to pay taxes again' is taken as a maxim or is generalized (that is, becomes a 'general law'), then the little effort government has made will pale into nothingness, for the few social amenities provided through the 'forced' collection of taxes would not be there. The implication is that those who refuse to pay taxes and the entire citizenry will suffer the effect of such maxim.

What the above tries to capture is that trying to promote self-interest above the common good is not entirely rational no matter how 'rational' the explanation as regards the cause of the action would appear to be. It would therefore be absurd for one to term behaviour rational when it produces undesired effects either immediately or in the long run. Such behaviour is ambivalent in that it amounts to pursuing an end that one does not want. This is why Asouzu makes the point that "if we act under the assumption of unmitigated self-interest devoid of considerations for the common good, our action has an inherent moment of contradiction because in seeking to negate the common good, we indirectly also negate our own interest" (Method, 237). The best way to escape this contradiction is for the human mind to come to terms with the

phenomenon of ambivalence which underlies his actions, and then makes effort to pursue what is fundamentally authentic.

Understanding the phenomenon of ambivalence would make or enhance our moral consciousness. The issue of morality could not entirely be divorced from our conception of what rational explanation involves in so far as we are talking about human actions. Human beings, according to Pratt, are “typically subject to moral obligations, and this is a further difference between them and the objects studied by natural science” (90). Related to this is the fact that man is a political animal. This, according to Jacques Maritain is that “he is a rational animal, because reason requires development through character, training, education and the cooperation of other men and because society is thus indispensable to the accomplishment of human dignity” (Qtd. in Eneh and Okolo 50 – 51). Being a rational animal means that man naturally can discern what is good behaviour from what is bad behaviour. Man only engages in bad behaviour because of interest which he may see as positive. But this is only as a result of moral weakness. If man were to take the concomitant problems associated with his moral weakness seriously then, he would always attempt to be morally upright. He would know that just as the self-need the society so does the society needs the self. This would force it on him to know that nefarious acts like embezzlement, vandalization, disregard for sanctity of human life, graft, etc. are crimes committed against himself and these would not augur well for the social order.

In this way, whenever we talk of giving a rational explanation about human actions, we should also make allusion to the morality of the said action. This becomes quite important because explanation in the “human sphere”, according to Pratt, “is not a matter of finding covering laws” (77). It is simply more than that. Explanation of what causes human actions, especially the paradoxically puzzling types we have been discussing, entails providing deep understanding of the action. In such understanding, we assimilate what is obvious and clear to us with that which is puzzling and not immediately intelligible (Onigbinde 76). For example, in explaining the action of a vandal who breaks the pipeline to scoop fuel, we will seek to explain his action by looking at his reasons which may be that: (i) he has been marginalized by government (ii) he has no employment (iii) his land which he would have cultivated has been spoilt by gas flaring (iv) the only source of income, therefore, is to scoop and sell fuel if he must survive. These reasons perhaps, are obvious facts that can be attested. But the puzzling and unintelligible part is the act of not fearing for his life or that of other members of his society. In this sense his instinct of self-preservation has tended to subvert his rationality. Thus in explaining such actions from the complementary stand-point and with reference to the phenomenon of ambivalent situation, we assimilate in a very complementary manner both the historico – environmental conditions of the individual with the primordial interest of self-preservation. It is such model of explanation that can lead us to a comprehensive understanding of the said action.

This is why it would not be entirely acceptable to discount ‘participants’ account or reasons as explanation for their actions. Failure to take the participants reasons for their actions into consideration in the course of explanation would in turn means undermining the human beings involved as not being rational at all. In view of this, an understanding of the ambivalent human situation becomes very significant if we must give a rational explanation of human actions.

Conclusion

This work has been an attempt to show the inevitability of ambivalent of human existential situation as a measure of rational explanation of human actions. The ambivalence of human situations 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.

We have argued that models of explanation in science, employed in social theory have often detached the idea of what is rational from the human existential situation and to this extent such explanatory models have somewhat been lopsided and defective.

In our exposition of the notion of ambivalence of human existential situation, we have appealed heavily to Professor Asouzu’s book on the subject by reviewing the basic point of his idea. 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 latent or

hidden meanings of such actions. This index of rational explanation, we should further agree with him, could best be explained through complementary reflection.

“Complementary reflection” could be said to be a ‘Calabar School of Philosophical thought’ or better still a philosophical blue-print incidentally propounded by Professor Asouzu. This philosophy, which to our understanding is very encompassing, seeks to build bridges of unity between and among the opposing strands of reality and competing interests, not unmindful, however, of the potentialities of each diverse strand or interest respectively. It seeks to interpret and explain realities from a complementary standpoint rather than from an exclusivist standpoint, taking cognizance of the possible usefulness of each component of reality – whether positive or negative.

It is our conviction that with its underlying imperative – the principle of harmonious complementation and the principle of progressive transformation, complementary reflection could lead us to reflect critically and deeply on the limitations and facticity of human existence with a view to understanding and managing the double capacity of our interest and other intrigues associated with it. It is on this conviction that one is tempted to consider complementary reflection as a better model of rational explanation than some others that are utterly exclusivist in nature.

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