

HUMAN EXISTENCE AND THE IDEA OF CULTURE: EXPERIENCING SATISFACTION AND COMFORT IN LIFE

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Abstract

This discourse discovers that the human person lives in a particular condition. It is the condition of his/her existence being a task and challenge. Acknowledging that there are multiple definitions of the word culture however, identifies and operates by the strict conception of culture which sees culture as all inventions, material (devices) and immaterial(ideas) to confront his/her challenges in order to ensure satisfaction and comfort in living. By the traditional critical and analytical methods of philosophy, it deduces that as a consequence, the human person cannot afford to be irrational, artificial and wasteful in human existence as these make the human person a victim of human existence rather than an agent to experience satisfaction and comfort in life.

Keywords: Human Existence, Culture, Rational, the Human Person, Experience, Comfort and Satisfaction

Introduction

It is ironical how human beings have an approach to life that should actually make them get nothing from life other than misery and subhuman existence, yet they desire to experience the good life. This discourse identifies the specific condition of human existence. Following from this specific nature of human existence, it makes clear that just any attitude towards human existence cannot guarantee the good life that is the desire of every right thinking person.

Only a specific approach that is right, responsible, adequate and that eliminates the attitude of irrationality, artificiality and wastefulness in humans` approach to the task and challenge of human existence can ensure the good life.¹

Human Existence

The human person exists in a specific condition. It is the condition of having to relate to his/her environment in a certain way if he/she is to experience satisfaction and comfort in living. This condition may not easily be perceived today as it truly is. The reason why the situation may not be seen today as it really is, is because previous generations of humans had done a lot on our environment that our current generation is shielded from the original task of having to invent ideas and devices to confront the challenging demands from our environment as far as living satisfactorily and comfortably is concerned.²

The world that we live in today is a world that has been worked on through culture by immaterial (ideas) and material (devices) by our ancestors. These creations by our ancestors are the reason we do not feel much the insecurity that is at the very basis of human existence. For instance, the food we eat, the clothing we have, the houses we live in, the form of society we live in, the institutions we have, the knowledge we share and live by, the vehicles we drive to name but a few are creations of the human person which enable us to have the level of satisfaction and comfort that we have. Importantly, all of these were created to confront the insecurity of the human environment to enable humans have the good life encapsulated in living satisfactorily and comfortably.³

The Idea of Culture

There are multiple definitions of the word culture.⁴ In this work, we are working by the strict conception of culture which sees culture as all that the human person has to invent to confront his environment in order that the good life may result. At the ordinary level, culture is defined as a people's way of life. However, if we ask: why have a people chosen a particular way of life? We have simply gone philosophical! The philosophical is very revealing! We find that people choose a particular way of life because for them, they find it confronts their environment to enable them live better. People therefore do not arbitrarily choose a particular way of life. It is always for the purpose of their sustenance. Hence the definition of culture at the strict and philosophical level is the material and immaterial inventions of the human person to confront his/her environment in order to live satisfactorily and comfortably.⁵

Culture conceived in its strict sense as above has three components: 1. The creators' component 2. The inheritors' component and 3. Simplification component.⁶

The Creators' component of culture: This component of culture reminds us of our ancestors who felt the need for a better life in encounter with the natural environment. Following the need in their environment, they invented materially (devices) and

immaterially (ideas) to confront the challenges. In this, the creators also lived by all that they invented in order to have a better life.

The inheritors' component of culture reminds us of succeeding generations who inherit the devices and ideas, that is, culture that has been created by their ancestors as solutions to their own problems in their encounter with challenges of nature. The inheritors of this culture may not know the exact environmental challenges that have led to the culture they have inherited by socialization. However, they have to live by it by question of routine and custom/tradition. This is where sometimes frustration sets in when one has a lifestyle he/she continues with, but without knowing exactly why he/she should sustain it.

The simplification component of culture instructs us that when an inherited culture begins to hurt badly and there is despairing in it, the natural thing that the human person wants to do is to simplify it. Simplification here means the desire in the human person to strip culture to its essential nature. It is the interrogation of culture in a manner that returns the human person to creators' level of culture - where culture is formed/invented based on the sustenance of the life of the human person that it provides. In simplification, any aspect of inherited culture that cannot demonstrate its role of sustenance of the human person in existence is jettisoned.

Finally, culture in its strict sense as used above comes down to be the security/sustenance of the life of the human person that humans invent to guarantee the good life. Culture therefore in its essential nature has a purpose - to sustain humans in existence satisfactorily and comfortably. No wonder Ortega y Gasset says, life is a shipwreck and culture is the life boat/life jacket that we have in the midst of the shipwreck.

Imperatives of Culture for Having the Satisfactory and Comfortable Life

Some imperatives surface in our consideration of the concept of culture from the strict point of view as we have seen above if the human person is to have a satisfactory and comfortable existence in the condition of existence of the human person. Three imperatives precisely emerge:

1. The production of culture in the face of insecurity of his/her environment is strictly from tasking the rationality of the human person who has interpreted the environment as requiring adequate inventions in response to ensure the sustenance of life. In the midst of insecurity leading to invention of security, that is, culture, there is therefore no room for irrationality. This is because the human person that desperately needs security (culture) in the face of insecurity (unsustainability of the human person from the environment), cannot afford to be irrational before this all important task of through his/her rationality inventing sustenance.⁷Anything

other than this will mean death or a miserable life for the human person. The human person would not want this evil consequence!

2. Following from the appreciation of the need for a carefully crafted package of security for the life of the human person in confrontation of his/her environment of unsustainability without the intervention of humans, the human person, from rationality tends to shun all wastages of all already acquired resources useful for sustainability. Any action contrary to avoidance of waste of resources will mean double task and waste of energies of the human person that could be channelled for other ventures in the mission of sustainability from unsustainability which is basically the struggle that the life of the human person consists of.
3. The life of the human person from the basis, will always involve the challenge to living the good life which the human person must respond to through his rationality and eventual production/invention of culture as a means to ensure he/she lives in satisfaction and comfort. Preceding generations as noted above may perform this task for a generation. Nevertheless, to be in good control of invention of culture to ensure the good life, the human person will always encounter this task. This task always involves honest application of the human reason, searching for the best possible security, that is, culture to launch in order to have the good life. As the whole task is like that of having a good lifeboat/lifejacket in a shipwreck in the sea, there cannot be any space for the human person acting or living artificially. It has to be only acting and living that adequately responds to the life threatening situation of the condition of human existence without the intervention of humans.

Above therefore, we have conveniently identified that in the task of the human person intervening in the natural environment to guaranty the good life, Irrationality, Wastefulness and Artificiality have no place in the effort of the human person to secure the satisfactory and comfortable life.

Lessons For Today's Society

- a. **Rationality:** We have seen that human existence is a task that has to be taken with all seriousness. Taking it with levity, is like a people agreeing to make life miserable and toilsome. No right thinking person wants that. We desire the good life.⁸

The good life requires application of reason to life that is a task. This application of reason, it must be emphasized, has to be honest. Yes, honest application of reason to the challenges of human existence and the overcoming of them to ensure

the good life. This is contrary to what obtains in many African countries. Our leaders are to understand that human existence can only offer one what one through reason demands from it. The good life does not come about on its own. The good life has to be worked for through application of reason to life. The good news is that when one works diligently for the good life through honest application of reason to the environment, the good life comes. It is because the good life has not been diligently worked for in many African countries that it has eluded them. Life therefore is such that what one puts into it is what he/she gets from it. I know that some may disagree with this principle. However, I like to state that it is when one does not understand the details of this principle that he/she disagrees with it. The truth is that when a people in their environment, out of reason and honesty, invent an adequate and responsive culture to a perceived problem in their environment, if they are committed to it, it produces the desired result. This is surely a lesson for many African countries in misery. Their approach to their problem has to be checked.

- b. Wastefulness:** resources and funds of the society, given the challenging condition of human existence requiring serious tasking of the human person, are usually got from the hard work and sweat of the humans in the society. For Political leaders of society to embark on wastages of these resources and funds through corruption is to not to understand the condition under which such resources and funds were made in the human condition of existence.

Wastages by which in an essential manner we mean senseless spending of the hard earned resources and funds of society. Such wastages enslave the human person and make his/her inventions and creations to serve other undeserving ends instead of serving the human person. The human person should labor to invent and create in order that the good life may result; when the good life eventually results, by all means, he/she should enjoy the fruits of his/her labor. This again should be a lesson for African countries, our approach to life, that is culture should be so well directed by reason as to engage humans in productions to ensure the good life, and then, the produce is not to be siphoned away by political leaders, but to be distributed on the basis of justice to all in the society, in a fashion that does justice to all, to enjoy the good life. Wastages of public resources and funds are to be avoided by all means because what is wasted was produced by the hard labor of real human beings. All common good results from hard labor of real human beings. Common good therefore are to be carefully handled by leaders of society to ensure they translate into satisfactory and comfortable life for the people.

- c. **Artificiality:** An appropriate appreciation of the condition of human existence which is a task and needing the human person to apply his/her reason to invent in order to have the satisfactory and comfortable life, obviously cannot permit artificiality as far as honesty in behavior that is required to have the good life is concerned. In the human condition, to have the good life, one needs to understand his/her environment; understand the challenges; know what to do through reason to change the challenges of the environment for good; and must be committed in action to all perceived to be what will bring about living in satisfaction and comfort.

To guarantee the good life, artificiality, by which we mean one not being genuine in comprehension of one's environment and in the proffered solution for the decent life to result, is only a recipe for catastrophe.

This catastrophe is not the desire of any right thinking person whose intervention in life should save from senseless pains and sufferings and gravitate to satisfaction and comfort in living⁹

Conclusion

The imperatives of rationality, non-wastage and non-artificiality arising from the human condition of existence and culture as a means of having a secured existence, cannot be neglected while seeking the good life in the human society. They are to be watch-words in every genuine struggle of leaders to provide the good life for their people.

Endnotes

¹ Ortega y Gasset, *Man and Crisis*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, INC., 1958), P. 34

² *Man and Crisis* P. 23

³ *Man and Crisis* P. 97

⁴ Abiola, Irele, Culture and National idea, *African Philosophical Inquiry*, p.28

⁵ *Man and Crisis*, Pp. 97-101

⁶ Joachim Ukutsemuya, "The Question of the Meaning of Human Existence: "A Philosophical Reflection on Ortega y Gasset's Shipwreck Analogy." *APPON Philosophical Quarterly* 1, No.2 (2022): 72-73

⁷ Andrew Efemini, *Philosophy, Politics, Development and Culture: Essays on Social Transformation*. (Port Harcourt: Gitelle Press, 2019), p. 64-67

⁸ *Man and Crisis*, 33-34

⁹ Peter S. Onwe, “An Examination of Good Governance and state of Security in Nigeria. *Philosophy and National Security, Interrogations in Distressed Nation*, Vol. 1. (2021): 34-36

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