

Human Sociality And Environ-Mentality: In Defence Of Lifeworld

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Abstract:

There are many and varied understandings of human nature, each depending on a particular perspective. This also explains why all humans are deeply social by nature. Human groups maintain a high level of sociality despite a low level of relatedness among group members. The lifeworld is the grand theatre of objects variously arranged in space and time relative to perceiving subjects and also is the ground for all shared human experiences. Although, individuals exist in their environment, society (the world) also exists in the individual himself and could not exist at all, apart from the real activity of its members. Drawing from philosophical insights, human beings in their different situations manipulate their possible being; every human action and cognition is an effort after meaning and no matter how bizarre the actions of individuals are, they are determined and governed by worldviews and influences. The human character of philosophy shows that philosophy is a man-centred existential relation of manifestation. Hence, it cannot be wrong to infer that sociality and environ-mentality is the authentic grounding of the lifeworld.

Introduction:

The most striking characteristic of the human being is his socially – that his life is encapsulated in social relations. For his survival and for the continuity of his species, man depends more on his social relations and his cultures. Social relations could be explained on the grounds that two or more people or a group coordinate with each other in such a way that their thoughts and actions are complementary – what one person does makes sense with reference to what the other persons do. Okonkwo (2007: 191) puts it this way:

Our life-histories are intertwined with those of others, and our identities are forever bound up with alterity i.e. otherness, no where more self-evident and nowhere prove to be clearly an unmistakable fact especially in the very moment, when we have nothing else but our relationships with others to rely on in order to restore our broken self-understanding.

Fiske (accessed 2011) agrees when he writes that, “we can appropriately say that a social relationship exists when any person acts under the implicit assumption that they are interacting with reference to imputedly shared meanings”.

Human groups maintain a high level of sociality despite a low level of relatedness among group members. There is a collective inter-subjective pool of perceiving which Husserl (1970), explains as both universally present and, for humanity’s purposes, capable of aiming at objective truth or as close to ‘objective’ as possible. This is what could be gleaned from Okonkwo (2008) as environ-mentality. The lifeworld is this grand theatre of objects variously arranged in space and time relative to perceiving subjects and also is the ground for all shared human experiences. This paper, drawing from philosophical insights, attempts to examine how the environmentally conscious human being in society is the condition for lifeworld (worldhood).

Human Sociality: The Sociological Framework

The whole world history is nothing but the daily activities of individuals pursuing their aims. By this is not meant individuals who are isolated and self-conceited, but about the actions of the masses, the deeds of historical personalities and peoples. The main issue here is the fact that all activities take place in and revolve around the human condition in relation to being and time.

There are so many and varied understandings of human nature, each depending on a particular perspective. And surely, there are a number of perspectives that are by no means mutually exclusive on the fundamental nature of human beings. Okonkwo (2009a:2) explains this thus:

Because human beings in their different worldhoods manipulate their given/possible urstoff mutatis mutandis, it is therefore an implicit necessity that there are different kinds of functional frameworks or methods through which philosophical ideas can clearly be rendered.

While the concept of human nature could be said to explain the set of characteristics including ways of thinking, feeling and acting, that all 'normal' human beings have in common, social order represent social structures, institutions and practices which conserve, maintain and enforce 'normal' ways of relating and behaving. Omenukor (2009:109) states that:

An individual developing within the framework of a social system has both certain dependence on the whole system or social standards and an autonomy that is a necessary pre-condition for the life and development of the system

Although cultures and individuals vary considerably on, among other things – the strength and in the forms of their sociality, all humans are deeply social by nature. Fiske (accessed 2011) writes:

even self-interested individualism itself is a form of culturally organized interdependence in which people organize their interaction with reference to models of 'self-expression' and 'self-esteem' – which are socially accomplished, socially displayed, and oriented to social values.

Patterns of interaction differ significantly across cultures, hence people need to be able to fit their sociality to their particular community, enmeshing their motives and actions with and within the culture. However, the diversity of situating

complex social relations within particular cultures presents its own problems in terms of learning. For instance, for that child who is born in one culture but emigrates to a foreign culture. Meanwhile, the coordination of interaction is all the more challenging because of the variety of domains that must be covered and coordinated – work, exchange, the meaning and use of objects, among others. And there is need to integrate several domains to form a personal relationship or an institution.

To achieve this, Fiske (1991 and 1992) observes that people just use four fundamental models for organizing most aspects of their sociality, most of the times in all culture – Communal Model, Authority Ranking, Equality Matching, and Market Pricing. Community Sharing is the relationship in which people treat some dyad or group as equivalent and undifferentiated with respect to the social domain in question. For instance, people who 'ask not for whom the bell toll, for it tolls for thee'. In Authority Ranking, people have asymmetric positions in a linear hierarchy in which subordinates defer, respect and (perhaps) obey, while superiors take precedence, e.g. military hierarchies. For Equality Matching relationships, people keep track of the balance or difference among members and know what would be required to restore balance. Market Pricing relationships are oriented to socially meaningful ratios or rates such as prices, wages, interest, rents and others.

For Fiske, people use these models to construct, coordinate and contest social action as well as interpret, plan and remember. This could also be what Okonkwo (2007: 189) meant when he writes:

Human evolution is a continuous configuration patterns for the cultivation of human-kind not only in terms of individual components and traits but more of the cultivation of meaningful human organization in anticipation of integration, direction, consensus and control.

This would become a lot clearer when the philosophical characteristics of form of life emanating from Okonkwo's reading of Wittgenstein and Heidegger is brought into focus subsequently.

Environ-mentality in Human Sociality

Society does exist outside the individual in the form of historically shaped system of relations with rich material and spiritual culture that is independent of man's will and consciousness. Although, individuals exist in their environment, society also exists in the individual himself and could not exist at all, apart from the real activity of its members. Molina (1962: 60) puts it this way:

The being of worldly entities can be considered as one with the being of the person in the sense that entities can have a meaning in virtue of their being set in a matrix of signification determined by the concern over the world on the part of a person (viewed as being-in-the world). This matrix of meaning, essentially characterized by relations of reference, constitutes the worldliness of the world.

Drawing from Heidegger's mordial dimensions of the Existential and Existential, Okonkwo explains the precise and interpreted demarcations that directly determine, the surrounding intelligible interactions that define Dasein's environment and mentality. The two major mordial relational dimensions of Dasein are – the present-at-hand conception of Dasein and the Ready-to-hand conception. While Ready-at-hand is not the characterization of entities but the logical characteristic of Dasein and as such, such entities project no possible need of other entities in order to be what each of their 'is' is. On the other hand, the ready-to-hand conception projects the intelligible disposition of Dasein by using practical designations of its workability with equations of 'dealing and concern'. 'Dealing and concern' being conceived as the mordial possibility – ground of Dasein's relational character for 'use' and 'manipulation' of proximate entities of thingness – things. Okonkwo (2008:247-258) maintains that "Entities gain categorical characterization because of the ready-to-hand relation", while "the ready-at-hand guarantees Dasein's main disposition for the apprehension or intelligibility of a 'wherein' which this paper understands as environ-mentality". 'Dealing and concern' in Heidegger's conception explains the activity of Dasein which is responsible for the possibilities of the totality of

interconnected relational attributes due to the nature of Dasein in the world. From the activity, manifests a description which Okonkwo (2008: 250) captured in distinct mordial relations – conspicuousness, obtrusiveness, and Obstinacy. In all the three relations, the existential relatedness to Dasein is subdued, hence Okonkwo (2008: 250-251) maintains that:

from the above three distinct mordial relationship, ready-to-hand entities manifest themselves to Dasein. The above mordial schemes can only clarify the world as world but the worldhood of the world is not yet uncovered.

For Okonkwo human beings in their different situations manipulate their possible beings, hence there is an implicit necessity that there are different kinds of functional frameworks or method through which ideas can be clearly rendered. Okonkwo (2009a: 4) captures this aptly "the different methodical frameworks guarantee different philosophical environ-mentality (consciously hyphenated)". The human being is an original value transcending the whole order of the factual and determinate. He cannot simply conform to the given without abandoning his creative responsibility as a person, even though he cannot simply assert himself without ending up in isolation. Johann (1968: 78) agreeing with Paul Tillich's observation, states that:

The affirmation of the self as part of the world and nature leads to a loss of the self, while the affirmation of self as a separate individual leads to a loss of the world. In either case, the person, who is not his own ground and can be himself only by relating to what transcends him, meets with frustration. If man is more than just a part of nature, it is because he consciously shares in nature's own ground.

It is not out of place to speak of every human action and cognition as an effort after meaning and no matter how bizarre the actions of individuals are, they are determined and governed by worldviews and influences. No wonder Okonkwo (2007: 190-191) maintains that:

If we understand how humankind gets to ideas that create symbolic forms of worldhood, is we understand the principles that control and govern their sociality, growth, development and interaction, we will have taken the necessary steps

towards understanding the legal systems that moderate, design and project the world in which humankind exist and fashion 'being-with-self' and '-others'.

This is the 'lifeworld'.

In Defence of Lifeworld

For Edmund Husserl (1936/1970), the lifeworld is the fundament for all epistemological enquiries. Lifeworld (*Lebenswelt* in German) could be said to represent a universe of what is self-evident or given; a world that subjects may experience together. Although having appeared in different terms in the works of so many other writers (Heidegger – Worldhood, Wittgenstein – Lifeform, and others). It was Edmund Husserl who introduced the concept of the Lifeworld in his *Crisis of European Sciences* (1936) writing:

In whatever way, we may be conscious of the world as universal horizon, as coherent universe of existing objects, we, each 'I-the-man' and all of us together, belong to the world as living with one another in the world; and the world is our world, valid for our consciousness as existing precisely through this 'living together'.

Husserl, in the same piece continues:

We, as living in wakeful world consciousness, are constantly active on the basis of our passive having of the world... Obviously this is true not only for me, the individual ego, rather we, in living together, have the world pre-given in this together, belong, the world as world for all, pre-given with this ontic meaning.... The - we - subjectivity... (is) constantly functioning.

Although the concept of lifeform represent a turning point in the philosophy of Edmund Husserl, as Worldhood is for Heidegger and in the Later Wittgenstein, where it appeared as lifeform, Okonkwo (2009:2) observes that the use of the world 'form' heralds a multitude of revelations of philosophical dimensions that can be called the 'character of philosophy'. This view is not misplaced because 'form' commands a characterization of an implied or imbued behavioural pattern, a modeling, and/or styling of life in a human worldhood.

Similar to Fiske who enunciated four fundamental models for analyzing human sociality, Okonkwo (2009), drawing from Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigation* (1953) and Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1962), explains his 'character of philosophy'. These 'characters' which include – the human philosophical character, the pragmatic character, the elucidation or relational philosophical character, and the operational character, represent the grounds and techniques applied in understanding man as being-in-the-world, and being-with-others. These characters show the congruent and divergent relations of man to the environment (lifeworld or worldhood).

The human character of philosophy shows that philosophy is a man-centred existential relation of manifestation. This relation is only possible through language because "it is the human activity that uncovers the Being of beings" (Okonkwo, 2009:147). The relational character can also be called the technique of linguistic elucidation – thus, the meaning of a thing as the ready-at-hand is a linguistic relational environment and stuff for use and meaning. The operational character is explained by the fact that every concept is a projection of an operational process. In every case, concepts indicate performable operations for the constitution of meaning. Pragmatism on its own represents the determination of 'meaning' of ideas or concepts in terms of their effect and practical objectivity in situated conditions.

Citing Heidegger (1962: 118), who maintains:

As the being of something ready-to-hand, and involvement is itself discovered only on the basis of the prior discovery of a totality of involvement In this totality of involvements which has been discovered beforehand, there lurks an ontological relationship to the world.

Okonkwo (2008: 251) explains that the lurking competence or capacity of Dasein to lift out of the podium of the ready-to-hand and the common disposition of the ordinary environmental totality – matrix and pass-over to another level of integrated referential characteristic assignment becomes the condition for the constitutive structuring of the worldhood (lifeworld) concept.

Conclusion

Man, among his numerous natural characteristics, is a social being. It is also completely in his nature to seek collectivity and mutuality with his peers – being-in-the-world and being-with-others. Okonkwo (2009a:12) writes that “in the terms of conventionality, conceptuality, interpretation, relatedness and everydayness, ‘form of life’ stands also as, the true stuff and signification of ontology of ‘home or worldhood’”. The human being is in the world not just as an entity, but as ‘a project of intellectual involvement and engagement’. Language as the ‘worldhood of the world and therefore the significant mortality or manner of the mentality of and for the environmental world’, is the most important human activity.

On this note therefore, to participate in a lifeworld (and lifeworld is nothing more than mutual participation) is to share a common sense of who ‘we’ are. Lifeworld furnishes this sense of who we are and who we value being, but it also requires constant reaffirmation. In the words of Okonkwo (2008: 252-253) Dasein’s being-in-the world is that of relational concern and equipmental framework of constitutive signification. Thus, man in his lifeworld is totally enmeshed and cannot escape from sociality and environmentality to be an authentic existent.

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