

THE EXISTENCE AND ESSENCE OF MAN IN A SOCIALLY CHALLENGED WORLD: A CASE STUDY OF NIGERIA

Chukwugozie Donatus Nwoye, PhD

Department of Philosophy, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam
Campus, Anambra State, Nigeria +2347034542127, cd.nwoye@coou.edu.ng)

&

Anetoh, Bonaventure Chike, PhD

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Tansian University Umunya,
Anambra State, Nigeria

&

Stephen C. Chukwujekwu, PhD

Department of Philosophy, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam
Campus, Anambra State, Nigeria

Abstract

This article examines the existence and essence of man in a socially challenged world. The problem of this discourse is to argue the fact that the world is socially challenged in many fronts. Through the philosophical method of phenomenology, it is found out that, in a special way, realizing the existential essence of man within Nigerian context is a near impossible task due to her own peculiar circumstances. Notwithstanding the above, in addition to other points, this study concludes that, coming together as a body and by necessary and reasonable means (dialogue; violence, if need be), we can bring the government of the day to address the challenges impeding the realization of man's essence in Nigeria.

Keywords: Existence, Essence, Man, Challenges, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

It is no longer news that man is challenged in our today's world by so many factors that well-meaning individuals are worried. The challenges range from those caused by man himself and others from non-man made, at the macro level. At the micro level, with Nigeria as a case study, these challenges are mainly man made.

To drive home this discourse, it unfolds in the following manner below. The first part explains the kernel terms that drive the study. Part two looks into the challenges at the macro level. Part three does the same at the micro level. Part four reflects on the existence and essence of man. Part five proffers solutions for the way forward. Then, comes the summary and conclusion of the discourse as part six.

CONCEPTUALIZING THE KEY WORDS IN USE HERE

A school of thought conceptualizes the term **Man** as “a human being, especially an adult male; the human race; an adult male with manly qualities, example, courage, virility; a male servant; an individual person; a person with specific qualities for a task, etc; an ordinary soldier, as opposed to an officer; a member of a team, etc; a piece in games such as chess, draughts, etc; a husband.”(Geddes and Grosset, 2010, p.297) But the term, man, as used in this discourse is man in a generic sense, human beings. That is, male and female, irrespective of colour, gender, race, position, status, etc. It means, *Homo sapiens* the rational beings different from lower animals. Beings, different from things. Beings that are capable of making choices, taking decisions as they move towards realizing their individual selves, uniquely. It means humanity, mankind.

Existence: According to Sinclair (2001), existence means: “1. the fact or state of existing; being. 2 the continuance or maintenance of life; living, especially in adverse circumstances. 3 something that exists; a being or entity.” (p.505) It connotes the idea of a living man or woman that makes effort to define his or her being through self-actualization. A purposeful being, an individual with purpose.

Essence “(Latin, *esse*, to be)”, means: “The basic or primary element in the being of a thing; the thing’s nature, or that without which it could not be what it is. A thing cannot lose its essence without ceasing to exist, and the essential nature of a natural kind, such as water or gold, is that property without which there is no instance of the kind.”(Blackburn, 2005, p.120) Essence is the substance, the defining element in man, that which makes a man different from other existent entities. It is the undeniable defining mark that makes whatever is what it is.

The term **Social** is from the Latin word *sociare* meaning to unite, from *socius* signifying companion. It is an adjective meaning “to relate to or for people or society as a whole”; it equally means “relating to the organization and behaviour of people in societies or communities.”(Mairi,1998, p.1329) It gives the idea “concerning the organization of and relations between people and communities.”(Hornby,1989, p.1213) Social signifies the existence of more than one person. It negates singularity, so to speak. It gives the impression of togetherness, companionship which is only realizable between more than one person, at least.

Challenge connotes the idea of “a new or difficult task that tests somebody’s ability and skill.”(Hornby, 2005, p.231) Challenge elicits the thought of demanding situation on an individual or group of persons. It calls to mind an usual situation that requires somebody’s total concentration and efforts to overcome. It is a condition of struggle that can come in the form of mental, spiritual, emotional, physical, etc., extraordinary demands on an individual.

World is variously seen as: “1. the earth as a planet, especially including its inhabitants. 2 mankind; the human race. 3 people generally; the public. 4 social or public life. 5 the universe or cosmos; everything in existence.”(Sinclair, 2001, p.1743). Hence, the world ought to be understood as the planet ‘earth’ as well as all realities in it.

Having conceptualized and elucidated on the key terms that form this discourse, the question becomes, what is the import of the topic which says “The Existence and Essence of Man in a Socially Challenged World: A Case Study of Nigeria?” The response it elicits is that of the situation of human beings living on the planet earth (existence) seeking to define and actualize themselves (essence) in a milieu which has thrown up some extraordinary conditions making demands on these human beings in a manner that their abilities and skills are being tested. This will be seen, first and foremost, at the international/world stage and, secondly; at the local stage, namely; Nigeria. In brief, it implies, what are those knotty situations the whole world is facing and those ones, subalternally, peculiar to Nigeria as a country?

The existentialists will say that existence precedes essence, “indicating that a person has no predetermined nature or range of choices, but is always free to choose afresh, and thereby reconstitute himself or herself as a different person.”(Blackburn, 2005, pp.124-125) But this maxim seems not to be the case with Nigeria as a corporate entity. The existence leading to the essence of Nigeria seems rather uninspiring, frustrating and ultimately with a very bleak future. This is seen from the angle of the incurable inability of Nigeria as a state to tackle and solve her teeming domestic problems much less contributing meaningfully to the comity of nations. Before examining this position, it is proper that those challenges the world is facing as an international body today is discursively brought to the fore.

MAN AND THE SOCIALLY CHALLENGED ISSUES IN THE WORLD TODAY

There are so many challenges confronting the world today that the existence and essence of man are being viciously threatened. They are so real and palpable that the

world leaders and experts in different fields of endeavour are concerned about them. It appears that they are being tackled. But how effective and efficient those efforts have become another issues. Below are the highlights of these challenges.

Health Challenges

Soul-searching discussions among scientists began echoing last year over a novel technology that allows people edit human DNA. It is named Crisper (pronounced ‘Crisper’) and it has a means of altering people’s DNA to remove diseases like cancer out of the human system. Impressive, isn’t it? Genetic Modification of Humans! “But what if it takes a dark ethical turn, and it turns in to a eugenics-esque vanity project to churn out ‘designer babies’, selecting embryos that produce babies that will have a certain amount of intelligence or that have certain physical characteristics?”, asks Bryan Lufkin. It implies, continues Rryan, that “While it’s still not widely used enough to be considered a current ‘grand challenge’, this is an up-and-coming advancement whose wide-ranging repercussions we need to be prepared for –and it’s all the more reason to ensure ethicists have a seat at the table at every laboratory, University and Corporation that might be itching to alter our DNA.”(Lufkin, 2017) One of the dangers is that the issue of sacredness of human life will be trampled upon as man can easily toy with human embryos, the incubator of life. Some religious sensibilities will, no doubt, be affected and that does not conduce for peaceful and harmonious living in the world.

Still under the health challenges is the fact that:

Every year around ten million people in poorer countries die of illnesses that can be very cheaply prevented or managed, including malaria, HIV, tuberculosis and diarrhoea. Tens of millions more suffer from persistent undernutrition or parasitic diseases that cause them to be less mentally and physically capable than they otherwise would be.(Wiblin, 2016)

The above is prevalent in developing countries especially in Africa. The case is so perhaps there is no fund to cater for them even though some individuals, countries of the world have more resources than they need. It therefore becomes a global challenge that some are in affluence but others in penury due to lack of even distribution of resources.

Still under health, Robert Wiblin has this observation to make:

Smoking takes an enormous toll on human health –accounting for about 6% of all ill-health globally according to the best estimates. This is more than HIV and malaria combined. Despite this, smoking is on the rise in many developing countries as people become richer and can afford to buy cigarettes. There appears to be a range of policies which have been shown to reduce smoking rates, which are usually not applied in developing countries. (Bryan Lufkin qtd in Wiblin, 2016)

Related to health challenge is the phenomenon of more aged population than ever before. “We won’t just be wrestling with the fact that the world’s population is exploding- but people are living longer than ever, too. Which is great – but all those senior citizens are going to require care. In fact, the number of centenarians will increase more than 50 times—from 500,000 today to over 26 million by 2100” (Bryan Lufkin qtd in Wiblin, 2016) Has the world got enough resources to care and cater for their needs?

Climate Change Challenge

Climate change is a phenomenon that has and is still startling the whole world. This climate change is caused due to cancerous substance or destructive fuel that is emitted into the atmosphere by man. It comes as well, as greenhouse effect, global warming, etc. This greenhouse effect is caused by man-made emissions of carbon dioxide through the burning of fossil fuels as well as through the cutting down of carbon-absorbing forests. Other greenhouse gases such as methane and nitrous oxides are also released through human activities. But how does this climate change affect us? The scale of potential impacts of it is uncertain. However, the change drives fresh water shortages, bring sweeping changes in food production conditions, and increase the number of death from flood, storms, heat waves and drought. This is because climate change increases the frequency of extreme weather events. The poorer countries which are least equipped to deal with the rapid change suffer the most. Due to this increase in the amount of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere, there is increase in the uptake of CO₂ by the Oceans and this leads to the increase in acidic nature of rivers which will make people prone to malaria, water-borne diseases and malnutrition. Evidently:

Floods and rising sea levels are becoming more common in coastal regions like Florida, etc., as population grapple with the effects of climate change. ...if current trends continue, we may have to come to

terms with losing whole swathes of cities, islands and low-lying regions in Bangladesh. The economic impact to regions will be profound and climate refugees could become the norm.(Bryan Lufkin qtd in Wiblin, 2016)

Dwindling Resources Challenge

The new technology and devices that characterize the 21st Century all need uncommon earth metals to manufacture them. An average Smartphone has over 60 materials that produce it. “That’s putting a strain on the planet’s natural resources: in China, where 90% of the world’s rare metals are found, it’s estimated that its mines will run out in the next two decades—and good substitutes for those materials are hard to come by.”(McIntyre, 2016)

Self-Determination Challenge

We have the situation where certain people who wish to live as independent nations are being frustrated from achieving their dreams despite the fact that it is a right enshrined in international law guiding the nations of the world. We have the Catalonia in Spain, Taiwan in China, Crimea in Eastern Ukraine, Ambazonia in Cameroon, Biafra in Nigeria, etc. The quest to be independent and the refusal of such aspirations has brought big strain to the relationships that exist among the people of the world, and as such, it is a big challenge to our contemporary world.

Terrorism/Refugees/Humanitarian Assistance Challenges

Terrorism has become a common occurrence in our contemporary world. Every now and then, different acts and degrees of terror do greet our media both print and electronics. Through these media one experiences different acts of man’s inhumanity to man. From raping of unsuspecting innocent people, kidnapping, gunning down tourists in their tourist centres, shooting of school pupils in their classes or other people in public places to outright bombing of people in their places of worship, homes, offices, etc. This phenomenon has posed a serious challenge to the world leaders who are looking for a way to put an end to it. Related to it are people who are running away from areas that are prone to these terrorists’ attacks and seeking refuge in other peaceful places in order to survive and those in the same situation due to full blown wars in their countries—the refugees. Most times there are no enough resources to cater for these people because the situation is occurring in many places at a time, hence, putting serious strain on resources of the agencies in charge of refugees. Sometimes the situation is so grave that one begins to hear of humanitarian crisis due to lack of resources or refusal of some parties in the conflict to allow aids into the

affected areas. All these have become challenges to our contemporary world.

Wars/Nuclear Threats Challenge

The world is in the danger of wars. Almost every continent of the world has their fair share of war looming or already on. It has become a big concern especially where these wars are indirectly being carried out by the super powers as they struggle for dominance, supremacy in the world affairs. The most worrisome aspect of it is the threat of nuclear weapons. It is the reality of this threat that Peter McIntyre worried thus:

Despite reductions in nuclear weapons arsenals following the Cold War, there are still around 16,000 nuclear weapons in the world, with the United States and Russia in possession of >95% of the world's weapons. These weapons have the potential to cause suffering and destruction on an unprecedented scale. A 1979 report by the U.S. Office of Technology Assessment estimated that in an all-out nuclear war between the U.S. and Russia, 35-77% of the U.S. population (105-230 million people) and 20-40% of the Russian population (28-56 million people) would die within the first 30 days of the attack. (Wiblin, 2017)

Apart from the immediate deaths as seen above, one can imagine the toll as those who will not make it through sustained injuries and those due to shortage of proper medical care and other aggravating circumstances put together. It is therefore a big challenge in our world today.

Artificial Intelligence Challenge

The problem of artificial intelligence is articulated thus:

Many experts believe that there is a significant chance that humanity will develop machines more intelligent than ourselves during the 21st century. This could lead to large, rapid improvements in human welfare, but there are good reasons to think that it could also lead to disastrous outcomes. The problem of how one might design a highly intelligent machine to pursue realistic human goals safely is very poorly understood. If AI research continues to advance without enough work going into the research problem of controlling such machines, catastrophic accidents are much more likely to occur. Despite growing recognition of this challenge, fewer than 100 people worldwide are directly working on the problem. (Wiblin, 2017)

Effective Altruism Challenge

The issue of effective altruism has constituted a serious challenge in the world.

Effective altruism is about using evidence and reason to figure out how to benefit others as much as possible, and taking action on that basis. Promoting its ideas can increase your impact many times over, through influencing other altruists to pursue the very best opportunities for doing good. Past efforts to promote effective altruism have already caused more than 2,500 people to pledge to donate at least 10% of their income to highly effective charities, with over a billion dollars in pledged lifetime donations. Promoting effective altruism also builds a community that will work on whichever global problems turn out to be most pressing in the future, so it's a good option if you're unsure about which problem is most pressing. Very few people are working on promoting effective altruism directly (between 25 and 100 full time, with a budget of less than \$10 million), making this one of the most promising ways to improve the world. (Duda, 2017)

Having looked at the existence and essence of man in a socially challenged world at its macro level, that is, at general, world stage; we now look at it in its micro level which is Nigeria as a case study of existence and essence of man in a socially challenged world.

EXISTENCE AND ESSENCE OF MAN IN NIGERIA

Since the inception of Nigeria as a sovereign state, many opinions have arisen as to the fact that Nigeria unlike many other states of the world is erected on false foundation. Some are of the opinion that it is a state created not to function well or succeed; it was built purely on economic interests of the erstwhile colonizers and their allies.

One tends to agree to this notion with the way things are seen unfolding in the country. The politics of the country is almost always based on ethnic sentiments instead of national interests. A particular ethnic group is perceived to be favoured by the colonizers before leaving the country at independence. This particular ethnic group, in spite of its backwardness in almost every aspect of life in Nigeria, is at the helm of the affairs willy-nilly with the surreptitious assistance from the erstwhile colonizers. This enshrined ethnic politics has spiraled into other aspects of Nigerian existence and has not augured well for Nigeria.

Today the same British-favoured northerners are struggling to dominate other ethnic groups that make up Nigeria to the extent of Islamizing the country. (Inyang, 2019) The media is awash with this evil plans as evidenced by so many senseless killings and destruction of properties of those mainly from outside the religious divide of the ethnic group in question. This idea is supported by the lopsided appointments of the security chiefs in the country where almost ninety per cent of the security chiefs are Fulani Muslims. (Junaïd Mohammed, 2016) A total disregard of the federal character principle enshrined in the constitution to guide the leadership of this country due to its multi-ethnic nature. This terrible appointment is believed to be the reason, impetus behind the spate of killings by Boko Haram, Fulani herdsmen, etc., from the Fulani oligarchy in charge of the current administration in Nigeria. This has led to hidden religious intolerance in the country as witnessed by the destruction of churches and beheading of Christians mainly in the Northern part of the country by Islamic sect (Boko Haram members) in Nigeria. This terrible situation has led to another forms of challenges in the country.

Currently, Nigeria is living on serious social suspicions. There is a serious mistrust among Nigerians especially among other ethnic groups against the north because of the way their people who are at the helm of affairs in the country are handling the nation. They are fast to declare a harmless group merely agitating for self-determination (IPOB) a terrorist group but have failed to declare a notorious group (Boko Haram) a terrorist group even when the said group has been seen and declared a terror organization by the International Community. The same is applicable to *Miyeti Allah* group. This group with their public utterances and official documents appear to be abetting the Fulani herders in their wanton destruction of people's farm lands, livestock to utter sacking and occupying of communities that are not theirs. All this under the watch of the current government mostly populated by Fulani Muslims. (Vlashima, 2018)

Under this ethnic politics in lieu of the national one, the economy of the country has not been doing very well. The country is largely run on borrowed money from advanced countries. The country's economy is still a mono-economy, depending only on oil in spite of the other abundant natural resources she can tap from. It is not that things cannot be turned around. But things are the way they are because the people in power do not want to bring the experts on board that can do the needful. Simply because they are from other ethnic groups different from theirs. This gross incompetence from the less qualified individuals occupying positions beyond their capabilities has spelt doom to the educational aspect of the nation.

While other countries are raising the bar of their educational standards, Nigeria is lowering her own in the name of trying to catch up with the educationally backwardness of part of the country. It's incredible! The system is marred with incessant industrial actions/strikes because of underfunding of the universities and other attendant issues.

The health sector is not spared. It is a common knowledge that the elite of Nigeria especially the political class do not attend any hospital in the country when in need of serious medical attention. They fly abroad for treatment even when they promised to fix the hospitals during their electioneering campaigns. The poor masses are left to suffer and die due to inaccessibility of good health care system in the country. All these are most of the challenges facing an average Nigerian in the country today.

EXISTENCE AND ESSENCE OF MAN

From experience, we make bold to state that the essence of man, essence of man's living, as shown by his existence is that of happiness through self-fulfillment. Every reasonable human being strives to achieve well-being. This well-being is undergirded by happiness via self-fulfillment. Our happiness ultimately results when we achieve what we have set out to actualize. The actualization of our real set goals gives us fulfillment and automatically happiness. This is what every human being strives for knowingly or unknowingly. Hence, our position in this study that happiness through self-fulfillment is the essence of man. Every human existence is existence for something. It is existence towards pursuing a particular goal or objective. In the pursuit of the set goal is existence experienced. It is in it that we experience our living as human beings. But this pursuit is not a pursuit of nothingness, it is a pursuit in search of something. This search, pursuit may be in the form of one profession or aspiration to become one thing or the other in life. Underlying this search, pursuit is the quest for happiness. Though more often than not unconsciously. When we become that which we earnestly aspired for, we have self-fulfillment. Self-fulfillment in turn breeds happiness in an automatic manner, that is, instantaneously.

In the light of the above articulations, how will a man achieve his essence though his existence in our world that is socially challenged in different ways as already explained in this study? Taking Nigeria as a case study, how possible is it for a man to achieve his essence, as understood in this paper, through his existence?

In the faces of gross nepotism; religious intolerance; unjust and discriminatory appointments into public offices; sponsored but covered merciless killings of innocent Nigerians and wanton destruction of their properties; killing of peoples' dreams by lack of proper funding of education; no provision of employments; lack of quality and good health care system, etc., how can someone achieve ones' essence (happiness) in this bedeviled existence (living)? We arguably state that, majority of Nigerians are not existentially realizing their essence in the face of the challenges articulated above. People are on daily basis getting frustrated due to the dysfunctional systems in the country. Many people have been killed due to Boko Haram, Fulani herdsmen, kidnappers, bandits, etc., and as such, have their essence, both in the process or on the verge of actualization cut short. Many have managed to graduate from different institutions of higher learning but no employment. Many have been displaced from their ancestral homes, living as refugees in their own land due to hidden evil motives of some other Nigerians. Many have been killed due to their religious belief. Many more have died due to lack of affordable and quality health care system in the country. The litany is endless! In the face of all this, what should a man in Nigeria do to achieve his essence?

WAYS OUT OF THE WOODS

We must continue in our individual struggles to actualize our essence without losing hope even in the face of seeming hopelessness. The intellectuals must engage the government in various forms necessary and reasonable to get them to address the situation in the country. Just like the lecturers are doing currently through ASUU (Academic Staff Union of Universities) strikes. Different communities must in any form resist the invasion of their lands by foreigners and not be intimidated by their mastermind. Other religious divide in the country must not succumb to the intimidations and intolerance meted out to them. In sum, in as much as we struggle to achieve our well-being individually, there is need for us to come as a body and engage the leadership of this country in a manner that will make them live up to their responsibilities. For the bulk of our challenges today is squarely on the poor leadership in the country.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this study, we made it clear that the world is socially challenged in many ramifications both at the macro and micro levels. After showing the instances of these challenges at both levels, the study went on to show that realizing man's essence existentially in Nigeria's milieu is a near impossible task. With instances to buttress

the claim above, the study proceeded to proffer solutions to the problems. This was after explaining the keys that drove the paper.

In conclusion, it is our assertion that, besides our individual efforts to achieve our essence in Nigerian society, we should come together as a collective body to engage the government in any necessary and reasonable means possible in order for them to address the bedeviled existential circumstances of our nation for the bulk of the challenges lie in poor leadership of the country.

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