

THE NATURE OF CONSCIOUSNESS: REIMAGINING HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS AS CATALYST FOR SELF AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Isaac Chidi Igwe, PhD
Department of Philosophy,
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
Email: ic.igwe@unizik.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

The paper is an investigation into the nature and fecundity of human consciousness. It engages different spectrum of scholarly and philosophical traditions to understand what it means to say that human beings are conscious beings, and why it is that the level of individual or national consciousness determines the level of self and national progress. Although the idea of consciousness appears to have two competing positions, the paper privileges the idealist position which conceives consciousness as the power of the mind to assign meaning, legislate for the world and reflect over its legislation. In this way, the objective therefore is to make distinction between consciousness as mere awareness and consciousness as a transcendental exercise which prerogative belongs to human beings only. The radical point of departure in the type of consciousness that humans possess is that it transcends mere awareness to a higher realm of self-reflection, concept formation and organization of immediate experience. In view of this, the paper argues that human beings are not only conscious of their nature, circumstance and environment, they are also aware of their individuality, separate from other entities. It is this unique status of human consciousness that makes it agent of self and social transformation. The method of inquiry is hermeneutic.

Keywords: Consciousness, Human Consciousness, Human Person, Problem solving, Reflective Thinking

INTRODUCTION

Consciousness could simply be described as an act of awareness. It could also be said to mean a *state of being*, that is, being present or at alert. For instance, when touched with a hot substance or pierced with a sharp object, one reacts. One does not only come to the realization of this very act but also can pinpoint the cause. Differently stated, the term consciousness describes an awareness of specific occurrences or processes. It sometimes could be an awareness of the self or the outside world. In other words, consciousness could be of our self-consciousness or consciousness of the other. "Sometimes it is used merely to distinguish between our waking states and sleeping-or unconscious-states" (Carter, 2007, p.203). It is on the basis of this definition that the debate on mental act or mental state ensued. Accordingly, thinkers like Plato, Aquinas, Descartes, Berkeley, Kant, Hegel, Husserl, etc., contended that the mental state exists. It is along this line of debate that discourses in philosophy of mind sought to represent such questions as: what is consciousness? Where is consciousness? Is consciousness material or other determined? All efforts made at

answering these questions gave birth to mind-body problem in philosophy of mind as it is known in contemporary scholarship.

Notably associated with the debate on the nature of consciousness is Descartes, who also doubles as the father of modern rationalism. He does not only reinstate his belief in the existence of mind as an integral part of the basic elements in a person, but also insists that the mind performs clear and distinct functions. In his words, “I consider that I was nourished, that I walked, that I felt, that I thought, and I referred to all these outcome to the soul” (Descartes, 1968, p. 278). Consequently, *thought* in Descartes’ mind means anything that is defined or marked by awareness or consciousness. For instance, mental states such as; thinking, imagining, sensing, willing, believing, doubting, hoping, dreaming and other mental acts are all marked by consciousness. In other words, since mind is defined by awareness, it implies cognition. For this reason, thinking as self-reflexivity or self-consciousness becomes inseparably linked with cognition (Osegenwune, 2008, p.97). In view of the foregoing, this paper attempts to present the idealist/materialist accounts of consciousness, using the Cartesian compass and how a fully developed consciousness serves as a catalyst for self and social transformation.

THE IDEALIST NOTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The beginning of idealism is the belief that consciousness is grounded in the mental and as such, the true nature of reality. The first question that comes to mind is, what constitutes the mental? Simply put, the mental is the non-physical, it is that aspect of the human person which perceives, feels, remembers imagines, wills and most importantly, thinks. It is other-wise called the mind. The mind is an immaterial entity wherein all mental states and processes occur: feeling memories, ideas and so on, are the properties of the mind (Bunge 1980, p.1). Some philosophers aptly describe or substitute the mind with the soul and spirit. In this sense, the mind is viewed as a faculty, the cognitive faculty, the power to think or a reality that has the capacity to connect divine light from the soul or spirit through consciousness. Put differently, any being that has the capacity to think has a mind. Hence, if you want to identify the existence of a mind, you look for evidence of thinking.

Stace (1940, p.146) argues that “all consciousness is conceptual thinking and conceptual thinking is introspectable”, which is why Kant would say that thought without content are void, and intuitions without conception blind.

As for the idealists’ concept of the human person, it is held that man is a thinking being. Although it could be objected that there are some aspects of the human person which are material, the idealist school insists that such material aspects are reducible to the mental phenomena. Clarifying this view, Armstrong (1968) writes:

Some theories of mind and body try to reduce body to mind or some property of mind. Such theories may be called mentalist theories. Thus, according to Hegel and his followers, the Absolute Idealists, the whole material world is really mental or spiritual in nature, little as it may appear so. According to Leibniz, material objects are colonies or rudimentary souls (p.5).

This view is the idealist's conception of the human person which has both the materialist and the mental components. It is a fall out of philosophical school known as idealism where idealism in the view of Omoregbe (2001) is understood to mean a;

Philosophical theory or school of thought Which gives primacy to spirit or idea over matter in its conception of reality Idealists generally deny the existence of Matter as an autonomous entity or substance existing on its own, independently of any mind or spirit (p.5).

Omoregbe further distinguishes between two kinds of idealism namely: subjective idealism and objective idealism. Subjective idealism denies the existence of matter. Accordingly, it is argued that what we call material objects are in the actual sense ideas in the mind of the perceiving individual (ibid, p.6). Armstrong lends credence to this view and notes that Bishop Berkeley and his philosophical descendants, the phenomenalist, hold that physical objects are constructions out of ideas or sense impressions (Armstrong, 1968, p.5). On the other hand is objective idealism exemplified by the German idealists, Hegel, Schelling, and Fichte. They completely deny the independent existence of matter as an entity separate and different substance from mind. According to Omoregbe, what we see as material objects are self-projections or manifestations of a spiritual reality underlying them (Omoregbe, 2001, p. 6). What this view establishes is that there is a spirit in the ultimate reality underlying every matter whatsoever. As such, the human person is predominantly spiritual. To some other philosophers, the soul ought to be admitted as a complete substance of its own, owing to the fact that its substantiality is identified with that of man and man has nothing other than soul, and since the soul is gifted with its own act of being, Man is completely a spiritual substance (Mondin, 1985, p.219). Stressing this view further, Beiser (1993, p. 4), says that Schelling conceives the absolute as that which does not depend upon anything else in order to exist or be conceived. In this sense, the Absolute is both existence and essence. It is independent of, and unconditioned by any other thing. The absolute is a *causi sui*; that whose essence necessarily involves existence (ibid).

Schopenhauer, on his part reduced the entire reality to mental phenomena with his popular view of the world as 'will and idea'. This of course is the idealist notion of consciousness and of the human person. Beginning with Kant down to Hegel, Fichte, Schelling and Arthur Schopenhauer; emphasis on the mental or "ideal" nature of all phenomena, saw to the emergence of idealistic and subjectivist schools as exemplified in British idealism, phenomenism and existentialism.

The point again is that, in the idealists view on the human person (whether that of the subjective or the objective position), what is common among them is that the mental, mind, spirit or soul take primacy in the constitution of the human person. Matter they maintain is reducible to the mental. The whole of this is captured in George Berkeley's *esse est percipi* 'to be is to be perceived'.

THE MATERIALIST NOTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The materialists categorize the notion of the mental, mind, spirit or soul as illusory. In their view, the mind is not a thing apart but a set of brain functions or activities (Bunge, 1980, p.1). In this sense, it implies that activities such as perceiving, imagining, thinking, dreaming, desiring, et cetera, would all be brain processes. This is otherwise known as materialist or physicalist theories of mind. On this, Armstrong (1968, p.10), writes that for a materialist, man is nothing but a physical object and so he is committed to giving a purely physical theory of the mind.

Historically, materialism from the Greek account is associated with Democritus and his atomic theory wherein he views that everything that constitutes reality is made up of atom. Although he does not deny the reality of the mental, he maintains that they are material in the final analysis since they are made up of atoms. To Democritus, it makes no sense to speak of the human person with words like soul, mind, spirit, existing side by side with the body. In a case whereby such elements exist, he contends, they simply arise to the functions of the nervous system. Within this view also, there are those who outrightly deny the reality of the mental and there are those who admit that although the mental exist but are reducible to matter in the process of its development. This is what Armstrong meant when he stated that in opposition to the mental theory, “we have materialist theories which try to reduce mind to body or to some property of body” (Ibid, p.5). To further clarify this view, Omoregbe, (1996) writes:

Like Democritus, before him, Epicurus also held that everything in reality was made of atoms, and that only matter existed. All events and activities in the universe were also explained by him as due to the movement of atoms as they float about in the void. The combination of a number of atoms as they clash with one another in their downward movement accounts for the coming into existence of things. The human souls and even the gods are all composed of atoms (p.84).

The philosophical notion of the human person according to the scientist is purely scientific, although we still have some scholars who seem to dangle between materialism on one hand and dualism on the other hand.

Armstrong rejects the idealism of thinkers such as Berkeley who denied the existence of matter. This is because he believes that denial of the existence of matter is based on a priori argument, that is, arguments independent of experience rather than on empirical evidence. Materialism and naturalism are very much alike although physicalism which is another word for materialism seems to be a narrower concept than naturalism. Materialism agrees with naturalism on reality being spatiotemporal. However, it states that all spatiotemporal comprises the entities known by physics. That is, entities like molecules, atoms, electrons, etc.

THE NATURE OF THE HUMAN PERSON

In the last sections, we attempted explaining what constitutes the idealist and materialist notion of consciousness and the substantial quality of the human person. In continuation of that exercise, more attention will be devoted here on Descartes' view on the same subject. But, before then, it is pertinent to quickly have a preview into the classical definitions of the human person. According to Omoregbe (1996, p.36), classical definition as provided by Bioethics, sees a person as an individual substance of rational nature, meaning that rationality is the distinguishing mark of a human person. Also, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, I:13 and 14, Aristotle asserts that the human being has a rational principle. Within the nutritive life, he shares this rationality with plants, and within the instinctual life, he shares with other beings. This, he says is the ability to rationally execute or formulate actions (Aristotle, 1996, p.12-13). Although Aristotle sees this feature as a universal human distinction, we can object that this definition appears ambiguous because it is open ended. Open-ended because it can as well be applied to both the wise and the foolish, and as such, it does not in any way follow necessarily the *making* of rational choices, as opposed to the *ability* to make them.

A rational being as stated earlier will necessarily possess consciousness, not just mere consciousness but also, a reflective one. That is, the capacity for deliberative imagination is man's defining feature. In essence, to be rational is a prerogative property of a cognitive agent, demonstrated in the agent's set of acquired beliefs, choice of action and in an effort to add value to his world within appropriate reason. In this way, it is only a human person that can possess the property of rationality and, in any case whereby a being which is capable of exhibiting rationality continuously violates this code, its basis of rationality becomes in doubt, hence, classified as irrational; for instance, mad people and morally depraved personalities.

Following from the foregoing view, the distinction between the notion of the human person and that of the human being is easily identified. What this means is that all human persons fall under the category of being a human being, but not all human beings fall in the domain of the human person. In other words, every human person possesses the qualities of being human (human being), but not every human being has the qualities of human person. To strengthen this view, Omoregbe (1996, p.37), writes that "a baby is, of course a human being, but it is not yet a human person, because it does not yet meet the essential requirement of personality". Accordingly, he goes further to outline what he calls the essential attributes of personality. These essential attributes are that: a human person must be a rational being, a free being, a moral being, a social being, a being that is capable of interpersonal relationship, and an individual being (Omoregbe, 1996, p.39). In addition to this, we can also include that a complete human person must be *rationally reflective*. It is not all rational beings that are reflective beings. If it were so, incidences of regret would not be known to human experience. A reflective being is that which, apart from possessing rationality, continuously reflects and, is conscious of this very property. It is for this reason that Lather (1988, p.575), says: "I feel keenly how self-reflexivity becomes increasingly central as I attempt to make meaning of my interaction with the data and the politics of creating meaning". Further re-echoed by Carter (2007),

It is a distinctive feature of our minds that they have a reflective capacity; we can think about our own thoughts, our own mental states. Furthermore, we have unique and privileged access to the contents of our own mental states. This access is unique in that

I and I alone am privy to my mental life. It is privileged in that, unlike my access to everything else in the universe, my access to my own mental life is direct and not mediated by my senses (p.7).

The above distinction of the human person's essential attributes is not remarkably different from Descartes' position, although he just simplifies his conception of the human person into mind and body, the incorporeal and the corporeal. The incorporeal is the mind, the intellectual, spiritual or the immaterial, while the corporeal is the body the material. If there is any claim that Descartes made, it is that the mind has a reflective capacity. Accordingly, he associates the following nature to the mind; willing, thinking, doubting and non-extension, while that of body is extension and motion. The mind is a thinking substance which can affirm, deny, infer, imagine and reflect. "To many philosophers and Theologians, the human mind is a unique and mysterious entity" (Henderson, 2007, p.56).

Descartes is so convinced of this fact about the mind that not even an evil genius could sway his mind to the contrary. As a father of modern rationalism, he masterly distinguishes between the mental and the extended. Today, the mind-body debate seems to be more relevant owing to the problem-solving dimension in which the human mind has been discovered to be capable of. The mind is a substance because it exists in itself, and does not depend on anything else for support. For Descartes, there is a clear distinction between the concept mind and body. He says that what forms the human person is mind. He arrived at this conclusion by subjecting himself to doubting everything he knew including his own existence. While doing all these, it thus dawned on him that doubting is a proof of one's consciousness, and that which engages in such an exercise is the mind. Therefore, he arrived at his popular statement *cogito, ergo-sum* "I think, therefore, I am", meaning that thinking is the starting point of any human person. Descartes explained in the second meditation of his meditation on first philosophy that not even a malicious demon is capable of implanting convincingly a delusion in his mind as to doubt his own existence. Thus, Descartes says: if I think that I am being deceived to believe that I exists, then my thinking so correctly implies that I must exist before I could be deceived (Descartes, 1968, p.103). Again,

What this implies is that anything that can be thought of, is, at least, in consciousness. Reason, Descartes says, "does tell us that all our ideas and notions must have some basis in truth, for it would not be possible that God, who is all perfect and true, should have put them in us unless it were so" (ibid, p.4). As explained by Stumpf (2002, p.197), by thinking, Descartes means not only reasoning but all mental activities. If I imagine, desire, rejoice, feel or even doubt that I exist, there must be an "I" that does these things. The absoluteness of his own existence is the foundation upon which Descartes builds his entire philosophical system. In the *Second Meditation*, having discovered the reality of his body, the next thing he tried to affirm was another attribute of the "I", that is, thinking. For as long as one thinks, Descartes says, one exists. Thus, he writes:

I am therefore, precisely speaking, only a thing which thinks, that is to say, a mind, understanding, or reason, terms whose significance was hitherto unknown to me. I am, however, a real thing, and really existing; but what thing? I have already said it: a thing which thinks (Descartes, 1968, p.105).

Looking at the above statements in the meditation, it appears that Descartes is not sure whether anything else exists apart from his own mind, although he reasons that there seems to be an external world of physical objects, a part of which seems to be his own body.

But it is theoretically possible that what seem to be physical objects are simply delusions placed in his mind by a malicious demon bent on deceiving him. In the second meditation, Descartes asks what the nature of physical objects would be, if in fact they exist. He concludes that their essence would be extension (Stumpf, 2002, p.198).

By this analysis, Descartes establishes the existence of mind and body thereby creating a new philosophical problem which is yet to be resolved till this day. He agrees that the human person is not wholly mental. In other words, both the mind and the body constitute the complete nature of the human person. This again, brings a new dimension to the question of how a mental state can exist side-by-side with a material substance. It is on this note that we shall proceed to briefly discuss his dualism to see what it entails.

THE MENTAL AND THE MATERIAL STATES IN DESCARTES

Descartes is best associated with the theory of mind/body dualism even though his eulogy of the mind ends up portraying him to be more idealistic than dualistic. He fluently makes a distinction between the mind and the body, and describes the mind as a living substance-standing apart from the body. The human mind he calls *res cogitans* (the thinking thing) which is responsible for willing, consciousness and so on, as we noted above. In his explanation of the self, the assertion *cogito ergo sum* “I think therefore I am”, establishes that human existence lies in the act of consciousness. And by extension, *thinking* or the dictum “I think”, is the major defining characteristics of human existence and personhood as we pointed out earlier. In addition, Descartes further avers that the root of consciousness is the mind, rather than the brain. In other words, the mind, in his understanding is the “self”, who performs the act of consciousness such as thinking, imagining, doubting, reflecting, and willing. In view of this, he describes it as mental, thought and non-spatial in character. What then is mental or non-spatial event? Warburton (1999) clearly answers it thus: “mental aspects are such things as thinking, feeling, deciding, dreaming, imagining, and wishing and so on” (p.131). For Descartes therefore, mental elements cannot be extended in space. The nature of the mind is thought *res cogitans*.

Unlike the radical idealists, for instance, George Berkeley, Descartes further establishes that aside the existence of a thinking thing (mind or the self), the body also exists. He classifies the body as an extended substance (*res extensa*). The body occupies space, perceptible and divisible. Thus, he writes:

By body, I understand all that which can be defined by a certain figure. Something which can be defined in a certain place, and

which can fill a given space in such a way that every other body will be excluded from it; which can be perceived either by touch or sight or hearing or taste (Descartes, 1968, p.279).

This view as presented by Descartes shows that the body is distinct from the mind. But then, questions which immediately come to mind include: How do I explain a non-spatial mind being trapped in a spatial body? Is this not an act of malapropism (language misrepresentation) or conceptual confusion? Does the mind truly exist? What is the validity of his claim that the mind is responsible for thought? To Descartes, these questions do not pose any problem at all. In his view, aside the ground that these substances are distinct, they influence each other. This latter view is the basis for his theory of mind-body interaction otherwise known as interactionism, the theory that the physical and mental states interact with each other.

However, for a scholar such as Bunge, there is nothing new in Cartesian dualism as it is just a repetition of what had existed most especially in Christendom long before Descartes. According to this view, dualism is part of religion, in particular, Christianity. As expressed by Bunge, “True, belief in the existence of disembodied entities (soul, spirits, ghosts, demons, duties, etc) is central to all contemporary religions” (Bunge, 1980, p.10). Ryle (1949 and 1968) describes the Cartesian system as *category mistake or linguistic misrepresentation*.

Notwithstanding the criticisms made above by Bunge and Ryle, our interest in Descartes in this section is not in the classical sense or in the debatable form as to whether the mind exist or not, or as to whether there is interaction or not. Instead, the focus of our discourse is to restate that the contemporary discourse on mind has moved away from the mind-body debacle to the point of examining how the human mind as established by the evidence of thinking, has become the mover of the world system. It was Karl Marx who admonished us that since the Philosophers had overtime debated a lot about the world; hence it is now time to begin to change it. This informs our resolve not to continue the unending mind-debate about dualism but instead, begin to demonstrate how the human mental processes of ideational activities proceed in meaning making of the world, through problem-solving and concept formation.

THINKING AND PROBLEM-SOLVING: THE GESTALT APPROACH

The statement that *thinking* is a defining attribute of a conscious being can never be overemphasized. It is pointed out earlier that it is that phenomenon which heralds the presence of consciousness. However, not all conscious beings are thinking beings. This is the very reason why we have what is called *simple consciousness*, possessed by the upper half of the animal kingdom. For instance, in this type of consciousness, animals such as dog or horse can be aware or conscious of the things around them just like humans do. The radical point of departure in the type of consciousness that humans possess is that it transcends mere awareness to a higher realm of self-reflection, concept formation and organization of immediate experience. In view of this, human beings are not only conscious of their nature, circumstance and environment, they are also aware of their individuality, separate from other entities. They can even create their own mental state as

object of consciousness. It is this self-reflexivity according to Cox and Raja (2011, p.3), that heralds the human uniqueness.

In view of this preamble, when approaching the subject of thinking, there are plethora of perspectives. Albrecht Muller, in what he calls *medium sized definition*, defines thinking as encompassing “all operations by which cognitive agents link mental content in order to gain new insights or perspective” (Muller, 2010, p.v). Accordingly, he limits thinking to mental contents. However, in its *differentia specifica*, he portrays the notion of thinking to be narrower than the notion of cognition and on the other hand wider than the notion of reasoning (ibid). For cognitive scientists, thinking is equated with a computer in the brain that is responsible for processing all forms of mental representations. “This representational and computational understanding of the mind/brain is the basis of “cognitive science,” the approach to psychology and philosophy of mind that took over from behaviorism in the mid-1970s” (Melser, 2004, p.2). On his part, Dingli describes thinking as disposition to behaviour or neurophysiological process in the human brain. To him, thinking is an interaction with outside world, external to ourselves and world which is the cause of our mental dispositions (Dingli, 2005, p.xi). In *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger describes thinking as; to contrive, to plan, invent, or to device (Heidegger, 2000, p.125). In essence, thinking can be said to be problem-solving driven.

Historically, Man’s arrival here on earth coincided with the existence of problem. In other words, the very fact of human reality explains the existence of problem. If there were no human species on earth, probably, the notion of problem may not have existed since there would be no intelligent being to conceive it. This however does not preclude the fact that a chunk number of the problems confronting humans are of our own making. From the archeological account, the primitive man thrown into a problem-riddled world, became compelled by the urge to survive and began the development of thoughts and an apparatus to cope with his surroundings (Bion, 1967a). To this primitive man therefore, necessity became the mother of thinking and invention was its baby. That is to say that the emergence of problem was the mother of calculative thinking as far as the primitive man was concerned. In this way, the challenge for survival gave birth to the manufacture of tools and food implements. These artifacts gradually grew into what we today refer to as technology. By this, the nexus between thinking and technology becomes manifest.

In recent times, emphasis appears to be shifting away from the study of the complexity of human thinking to the study of the different aspects through which acts of thinking manifest. In other words, contemporary philosophy of mind has shifted away from whether or not there is such element in man that thinks. The argument now is more of how to demonstrate the ways the human mind proceeds in transforming the self and the society (Unah, 2010). This is discussed through concepts such as: problem solving, active categorization or concept formation and decision making. This new wave is probably because of the realization of the potentialities embedded in man’s mental powers. In view of this, to understand problem-solving as an aspect of thinking, we need to understand what a problem is. According to Brandt, “a problem is, I suggest, essentially a practical or theoretical situation that inhibits the flow of our doings or our thinking and calls for attention and particular treatment in order to reopen the flow of our doings” (Brandt, 2010, p. 258). In his view, that which obstructs the free flow of nature and human objective constitutes a problem.

Gestaltism understands thinking to be intricately linked to problem solving. To be sure, the term Gestalt, is of German origin, and serves as a theory of mind belonging to the Berlin school of experimental psychology. It actually emerged as a movement in protest against what it called the

excessive atomistic views which held sway in psychology and philosophy in the 19th and 20th centuries. Its main devotion was to how we can understand the human ability to receive and maintain clear perception in a palpably disorderly environment.

Put differently, Gestalt theory of problem solving is a radical departure from the prior piece-meal approach to problem solving which had existed before it emerged. The Gestalt approach talks about a top-bottom-dimension to problem solving. For them, a whole is bigger than the parts, hence, top-bottom approach is the most viable approach in achieving a desired result in thinking. The theory insists that organization does not come-by from below-up, but from above-down. It maintains that it is the nature of the whole which determines that of the parts. The notion of the part does not make sense until it is juxtaposed in relation to the whole. Accordingly, it argues that “most whole are epistemologically and psychologically prior to their parts, and are totally different from a sum of their parts or even the sum of their parts plus some other kind of element” (Wertheimer, 2010, p.53). This theory believes that problems are specific in nature, hence, specific problem must require a specific approach. Solutions to problems require analysis and creative insights, and ability to concentrate on the conditions prevailing in a specific problem situation. In addition, it points out that most problems, wherever they are found, carry within them, their solutions. It is for thinking to search them out. Accordingly, “problem solving can be understood as the bridging of the gap between an initial state of affairs and a desired state when no predetermined operator or strategy is known to the individual” (Ollinger and Goel, 2010, p.4).

For instance, an exponentially arithmetic task such as $3^4=?$, can constitute a very difficult problem to let us say, a 5 year old child. But, not so for a young adult who may easily give the answer off hand. For the child, time must be taken to recall to mind exponential formula before thinking of a solution. Using the views of Ollinger and Goel above, the child has to apply the procedural rules in order to close the vacuum and arrive at the desired solution. But to a toddler, let us say, a year old child for instance, such question does not even pose a problem since it does not make any meaning to him. This also means that one must be in certain frame of mind to even identify and appreciate what constitutes a problem. Ritter (2010) illustrates a famous thinking puzzle. According to him, imagine, you are given two ropes and a lighter; each rope takes exactly 1hour to burn if lighted at one end. However, the burning speed along each rope is not guaranteed to be uniform and is not guaranteed to be the same as along the other rope-only the total burning times are equal and exactly 1 hour each rope. Given this as the only equipment, how would you measure exactly 45 minutes?

In contemporary philosophy of mind and research into psychic powers, effort is devoted into how the human mind deplores its metaphysical powers in resolving problems without necessarily resorting to gross matter. For a puzzle such as the one above, there is rarely any physical construct with which we can engage the task, “instead, we create in our mind a picture that captures these elements of the problem that we deem essential for its solution” (Ritter, 2010, p.347). Ritter calls this *mental model* in problem-solving. To him, the mind’s model is a powerful approach towards problem solving, hence, offering many benefits. For instance, adequately tapping into human mental capacity saves us of the cost entailed in gross matter. And on the same lane, it is quicker in arriving at desired and cheaper than deploying equipment.

THE ROLE OF UNDERSTANDING IN GESTALTIST APPROACH

For the Berlin school of Experimental Psychology (Gestaltist), thinking has basic principles which it must obey for there to be a desired outcome. The center of these basic principles is *understanding*. It is on this basis that they conceive thinking as “the meaningful effort to understand the fundamental nature and affordances of the given problem situation and the desired goal as a whole” (Ollinger et al, 2010, p.5). They further argue that when we understand the dynamics and interplay which lie between problem and goal, contextual factors and process factors, working memory and executive functions of the mind can furnish us with quick understanding of how the human problem solving skills work. On this, Wertheimer (2010) says:

The typical sequence in problem solving involves going from a lack of understanding, from a start of frustrated confusing vagueness about what is going on and what is required to solve the problem to a state of insight or the achievement of a veridical impression of the state of affairs (p.51).

Understanding of a problem they argue, takes us to the view of the genuine nature of the problem situation. Understanding how everything fits together and a clear conception of what is required to solve them, is paramount if a solution must be reached (ibid, 51). Achieving this understanding, to them, means moving from; sometimes, a situation which may appear senseless and incomprehensible to one, which clearly highlights the central features of the problem. During this process, Wertheimer adds, irrelevant aspects are ignored, and this makes meaningful solutions to emerge. This view is supported by Dale, Weems and McCormick (2000) in the following words:

You solve problems every day, often unaware of the process you are going through. In a learning environment you usually are given most of the information you need: a clear statement of the problem, the necessary input, and the required output. In real life, the process is not always so simple. You often have to define the problem yourself and then decide what you have to work with and what the results should be (p.23).

The central argument of the Gestalt approach is that there is no generalized solution to a specific problem. In other words, each problem situation is peculiar and must be studied and approached as such. There is no single format of dealing with a single problem. If one formula proves unworkable, there is need to reorganize, restructure and reorder the approaches to it. Most importantly, as we understood in the Gestaltist’s approach, having an in-depth insight into a problem situation is more fundamental than just quickly rushing into solution which may be temporary. Expressed differently, learning to do-it-yourself is more effective and productive than transfer of skills or method. Equally important for problem solving is learning how to dwell and wait on problem while insight occurs. Rushing to a quick fix will amount to treating symptoms at the risk of the causes.

DELIBERATIVE THINKING IN DECISION MAKING

Research and studies in recent times, have shown that most educated adults in particular are biased and unable to give precise answers according to probability theory in reasoning and decision making tasks. This was the view championed by Neys (2010). According to this view, the reason behind this development is that most *reasoners* often rely on intuitions, guts and feelings, rather than on more tasking deliberative reasoning (thinking) when making decisions. To be sure, it is not that Neys, by this view, was wishing away the usefulness of intuition and feeling entirely. However, he argued that they have over time proven not to be reliable in decision making time. To demonstrate an instance when reliance on intuition, gut and feeling do cost one a fortune, Neys invites us to imagine certain behaviour of a given customers in a given beer store. The owner of the store has special golden glass cups given to him by beer suppliers for free. However, some customers in the store prefer using the golden cups due to their glamorous attractions. The glasses do come six in a pack. When customers ask the beer seller how much does a glass cost, he would tell them that it is 5 dollars per glass but that if they could take a complete pack which is six glasses in all, they would have a 100% discount. By this, he literally meant that they would have the whole glasses free of charge. But, rather than these customers devote few seconds to ponder over the response and offer, they would intuitively prefer to pay the 5 dollars and take a cup-assuming that taking a full pack would amount to paying more money and the owner of the store, in turn making more money.

The above instance is what we describe as a structured elitist ignorance in the face of decision making. It is elitist because it is carried out by literate and educated persons who supposedly ought to give reason a chance in the face of decision making moments. Although in the scenario painted above, intuitive response could be useful in order not to fall prey to the gimmicks and tricks of marketing, the point that is emphasized is that non-deliberative thinking has the consequential ability of costing one big fortune in whatever circumstance. Intuitions are not necessarily useless. However, for Neys: "the point is rather that during reasoning and decision-making, it is crucial to check whether one's intuitions conflict with more normative considerations" (ibid, p.24). Most often than not, it does appear that people are unable to detect this conflict, hence, reasoning errors abound everywhere. There is always a conflict between intuition and deliberative reasoning, and in situations where this conflict is not overcome, the resultant effect would always be stereotyped reasoning. For instance, let us again paint a scenario of a given 1000 African men; 900 are South Africans and 100 are Nigerians. If these men are shuffled and the following statement is made about them, what would be the response?

James is a risk taker and successful in all his businesses. He just made the Forbs list of the richest African man of the year.

Question: which one of the following statements about James is most likely to be true?

- (a) James is a Nigerian
- (b) James is a South African

Now, it is most likely that a randomly chosen individual will be a South African owing to the number of South Africans in the options. But, due to stereotyping instinct resulting from the inability to adequately think deliberatively during decision time, most people would likely intuitively choose option A. Intuitively minded individual will begin to imagine that many

Nigerian men are scattered all over the world doing business, hence, the answer must be that James is a Nigerian.

The point in this section is to show that at the moment one begins to discriminate what things one wants, what other options are available to be surveyed, the benefits or otherwise accrued to each of them, and what among them is the most viable option, one is inadvertently immersed in the realm of deliberative thinking in decision making.

For this reason, it is imperative to reemphasize that the quality of our thinking determines the quality of our decisions. If a nation for instance, sees itself as the food-basket of the world in the nearest future owing to its comparative advantage, it must, at the expense of other items in which it has higher cost of production, begin to invest heavily in agriculture and also conscientize its populace to think same. The same goes for a nation that aims at being the military power of the world. It is very baffling today, to see nations not knowing exactly where their strength lies. This attitude highlights what some scholars call the irrationality in decision making. By irrationality it means, when we behave in ways in which we ordinarily would not have expected to. For this reason, quality thinking in decision making centers on the resolution to behave in certain ways and as such, it requires a choice and commitment to abide to it.

To put it more precisely, the crux of the matter here is not to say that one must always engage in extensive thought and analysis when embarking on any action. To do this will be absolutely ridiculous. If one has to think carefully before taking every step or making every utterance in an age when precision and time management are highly prized, one definitely would achieve little or nothing. What is rather obtainable from our daily experience is that many of our activities demand snap decisions which entail little or no time to think in details. Driving an auto-mobile for instance, hardly will there be enough time to analyze all the available options in their full details. In other words, decisions like changing to another lane, changing gear, sounding the horn, applying the break in emergency time and other similar duties, do not demand luxury of time. The point we press home in all of these is rather that, at each of these actions and decisions, a form of thinking is always set in motion even if the agent is unaware that he is doing so and for that reason, the mind must be duly engaged in order to arrive at sound thinking. The effective application of the powers of the mind will yield a well-organized life, activities and society. In view of these facts, it follows that one must always invest quality thought into all decisions even though it may not be in full details due to the peculiarities of each situation. This is what Clement and Gregory (1995) mean when they argue that:

Part of becoming a good decision maker is being able to identify those situations that deserve careful thought. The reason they deserve careful thought is because that thought might lead to any of a wide variety of alternatives, and those different alternatives can result in very different consequences right now, tomorrow, or even years into the future. Being an active and creative decision maker does not mean that you can predict the future or that you will never make mistakes. But it does imply a willingness to look at choices as opportunities rather than problems, to work through difficult decisions with care, and to strive for understanding and confidence in the choices you make (p.2).

Accordingly, when these authors talk about good decision, they mean the process of thinking through the issues, weighing other available options and finally settling at one option. On the other hand, authors like Mintzberg and Westley (2001) argue that it is not in all instances of decision making that deliberative thinking is sufficed. To these authors, when you can't think it, then see it. If seeing it is not sufficient, then do it. The thrust of their argument is that it is not in all cases that thinking comes first in decision making. Seeing they argue, can come first. "As Mozart said, the best part about creating a symphony was being able to see the whole of it at a single glance in my mind. So, understanding can be visual as well as conceptual" (ibid). For the pragmatist, thinking and seeing may be share waste of time when action could just be what is required. Accordingly, the pragmatist, in the views of Mintzberg et al., privileges *doing it*. The assumption is that, in the process of doing something, the necessary thinking could be spurred into action (Mintzberg, et al. 2001).

The first argument talks about being able to visualize the thing in the mind. The second talks about doing it first and after that, thinking follows. For the first, according to the orientation which we advance in this study, in as much as the visualizing or seeing is not something physical but mental (mind), it equally presupposes a sort of thinking. It requires a deeper integration of the idea of what is seen. Again, it is equally very difficult to draw a line between doing and thinking-which comes first. However, following from our argument in this research, we uphold that even in the process of doing, thinking is fundamentally prior. Decision making in our understanding is a process within which the mind ruminates, discriminates among other alternatives and in the final analysis queuing behind a particular choice considered to be most viable. Consequently, the argument of whether it is thinking, seeing or doing that comes first, is gratuitous because the second and third presuppose the first.

However, there must be a synergy between thinking and doing in particular. This means that while thinking is upheld to be prior, doing too must logically follow from what is thought. In other words, both the thinkers and the doers must be on the same page for there to be progress and oneness of purpose. Assuming that an organization hierarchically separates those who think or formulate ideas from those who do or execute the ideas in such a way that the former is assigned to intellectually sound people and the latter left in the hands of mediocre or ostensibly docile implementers, in this scenario, there is high possibility that what is thought may be perforatively represented owing to the fact that the doer will simply translate the instructions of the thinker into whatsoever he could make of them. Reverse would be the case if sound thought is implemented by sound executors. Thus, to transcend from the level of thought to the level of doing thereby we arrive to the point of sound and viable outcome, the issue must be clear, our data must be reliable with a structured context and a pinned down thought.

THE HUMAN MIND AS THE BUILDER OF THE UNIVERSE

In discussing how the mind proceeds to assign meanings, projecting into the realm of transcendence by which Ideas, concepts and plans are organized for system building, Immanuel Kant's analysis easily becomes imperative. Kant made the analysis of human finite reason the objective of his philosophy. In this exercise, his intention was to demonstrate the creative and

inventive powers of the human mind and how the mind proceeds to create or invent Ideas with which it organizes the world. While discussing the ontological structure of the human mind, he demonstrated that the mind has a self-built mechanism by which it is self-automated to create meaning and order in the midst of chaos.

For human reason, without any instigation imputable to the mere vanity of great knowledge, unceasingly progresses, urged on by its own feeling of need, towards such question as cannot be answered by any empirical application of reason,... so there has ever really existed in every man some system of metaphysics... it will always exist, so soon as reason awakes to the exercise of its power of speculation (Kant, 1934, p.36).

With this, Kant describes that ontological structure that is native in every man, the kind of structure which enables him to forge ahead, plan ahead and blossom in creativity. However, Kant's faith in reason is not a blind one, rather, he believes that reason left unguided leads to "groundless assertion" (ibid,37). It is on this basis that comes his critique of pure reason. In his view:

Pure reason is, therefore, that which contains the principles whereby we know anything absolutely a priori: An organon of pure reason would be the sum total of these principles according to which all modes of pure apriori knowledge can be acquired and actually brought into being. The exhaustive application of such an organon would give rise to a system of pure reason (Kant, 1970, p.58).

The definite statement which ought to be made here is that every system of meaning in the world is a pure product of mind creation. The analysis of the human mind reveals how it proceeds to affirm and negate, and at every point that the mind involves in this exercise of active categorization of reality, it inadvertently engages in the realm of metaphysical thinking. As expressed by Hume (1955, p.27), thinking can, in an instance, transport us into the most distant regions of the universe, the deepest of the deep or even beyond the universe into the unbounded chaos where nature is supposed to lie in total confusion. What never was seen or heard of, may be conceived, and there is nothing beyond the power of thought except what implies an absolute contradiction. What Hume seems to be expressing here is the transcendental power of the mind by which order is brought into the midst of disorder. Under this circumstance, man moves from the now to the not now, from the known to the unknown in search of principles for world reconstruction. In reference to world's reconstruction, Okoro (2006) says:

World reconstruction is an authentic quest by man to recreate, reinvent, rediscover and improve the quality of human existence. It is a holistic and enlightenment project that should touch down on the peoples and cultures of the world, intended to distill, purify and post us all beyond the palpable trappings of

nihilism. Invariably, the enterprise of world reconstruction is a continuum that entails the transformation, reconstitution, reconfiguration and reordering of entities into finer states of affairs (p.333).

In the forgoing views of Okoro, universe building which we speak of here is all about the inventive abilities of the mind. It is all about the creative ingenuity of man's transcendental power. In the exercise of this power by the mind, no realm is sacrosanct to its penetration. It can penetrate phenomena world down to the noumena. It can demystify the Kantian noumena –tearing the length and breadth of this realm, rendering every object therein accessible to all and sundry. That was why Baudelaire held that imagination as the Queen of the faculties created the world. It could be recalled that Kant had earlier postulated the two worlds. One he calls the phenomena world, and the other he calls the noumena world. Unfortunately enough, while he affirms the existence of the phenomena world, he was doubtful of the noumena world. In his view, for anyone to try to establish the reality of the noumena world is to attempt to transcend the limits of the human understanding and so achieve knowledge of a world that could never be empirically discovered. Such an attempt involves the transformation of understanding into “pure reason”, and Kant according to Scruton (1995), regards such an endeavour as doomed to failure.

Again, another definite statement which ought to be made here is that the architect of universe building is strictly a sole prerogative of man, by man, we mean one with developed consciousness. Man is the architect of meaning, the finite ego is the Lord of the universe. Wherever he is not present, meaning is not known. The mind creates, the mind annuls, it projects, and it equally withdraws. Reason is the spectacle which legislates on experience and by it alone, we appreciate difficult situations. All of these are subsumed under transcendental deduction. Through the analysis of the structures of human consciousness, Kant (1970) demonstrates abundantly how the mind goes about its creative activity and the contradiction involved. He navigates all of these through the transcendental process which could be interpreted as the unifying unity. Thus, “one of Kant's central claims is that the unity of the perceived world presupposes the unity of the ego - the ego sustains the world's coherence...” (Schroeder, 2005, p. 23).

By this consciousness, man creates himself. It is the characteristic of a living being's power of choice. “It lights up the zone of potentialities that surrounds the act” (Durant, 1962, p. 420). Wherever man projects his consciousness to; Ideas, concepts and creativity begin to take shape. Sequel to the Husserlian conception, man's consciousness does not lie fallow. It always has an object to part with. One cannot be a conscious being without image representation. This is so because imagination is essential to the freedom of consciousness. This freedom of consciousness according to Sartre does not take place in a void. That is, it is ever occupied with contents. In view of this, Casey (1981, p.145) avers that “when we imagine, we nihilate the world, the domain of the perceptually given, the empirically real, in order to enter a realm in which an unnihilated spontaneity becomes possible”. Through the power of a projected consciousness, we nihilate the world of phenomena into the realm where thought becomes the currency of trade. Whatsoever our consciousness is phenomenologically directed towards, renders itself as it is for grasp. For Sartre,

Images are characterized by a distinctive nothingness...In imagining, we are immediately pre-reflectively aware of this

nothingness, which assumes four different forms: non-existence, absence, existence elsewhere, strict neutrality: neither existing nor not existing (ibid, pp. 145-146).

In explaining non-existence for instance, Sartre says, when I posit an imagined object as non-existent, the object is either an originally perceived object that has ceased to exist (for example, a friend who has died), this is strictly a non-perceivable object that has never existed. In all of the cases, what is shown is some sort of relation entered into “with the imagined object is intuitive in nature (ibid). As Stace puts it, be it abstract reasoning, everyday common-sense inference, judgment other than perceptual, perceptual judgment, perception, dreamy consciousness, semi-comatose condition, and so on, they are all exercise in thinking conceptually. Accordingly, he believes that “there is no other kind of mental act save thinking. From one end of the scale to the other, the difference is only one of the degrees of abstractness on the side or fusion with the datum on the other” (Stace, 1969, p.173).

All that we have said of the mind; be it of consciousness and its modes, point to the immense possibilities of the psychic experience of man which places him at greater advantage than other animals. It is this mental power which he enjoys that makes him to always imagine of a better mode of life other than the one he presently occupies. It is through the generation of Ideas that man improves his life and society. That is why a man with richer Ideas stands at advantage over the one with lesser Ideas. Again, that is why a society with less or low mental power keeps struggling in ‘movement without motion’. The volume of a society’s mental tank (mind bank) as we had earlier noted, determines its place in the comity of world developers. As such, a society with rich mental capacity is never afraid of problems or challenges. The metaphysically sound societies and individuals ‘lead’ and others ‘follow’. The mentally developed societies produce and the weak ones consume and often turned to junk-yard. The mentally porous individuals and societies seek for foreign aids, while the opposite seek for a new territory to explore and new market to produce for. That is why this work upholds the need to consistently task the mind to generate Ideas with which the society could be re-ordered. The good thing about putting the mind into use is that, “the more frequently we generate Ideas to interrogate the social process the more we achieve greater understanding in our social relations and the more enduring the incremental value we add to human happiness” (Unah, 2010, p. 139).

In view of this, Kant makes it clear that it is not just enough to have consciousness as a necessary requirement for thinking, our consciousness must be endowed with receptive intuition through which object is given to us as pure matter. Here, Kant talks about “immanent” and “transcendence”; “a posteriori” and “a priori”; “intuition” and “understanding”. Each of the faculties of thinking the object of sensuous intuition which leads to the understanding performs a vital role and as such, none of them has a special preference over the other. Therefore, Kant (1934) sums it up thus:

Without the sensuous faculty no object would be given to us, and without the understanding no object would be thought. Thoughts without content are void; intuition without conceptions blind. Hence, it is as necessary for the mind to make its intuition intelligible. Neither of these faculties can exchange

its proper function. Understanding cannot intuit, and the sensuous faculty cannot think (pp.62-63).

CONCLUSION

The central argument of this study is that consciousness defines man, not just simple consciousness but reflective consciousness. It is the type that is defined by the act of thinking. All of these take place in the human mind as the center of all mental acts. The human mind, it is argued, is that substance that thinks and coordinates all mental acts. It is for this reason that the study made analysis of the powers of the human mind as the agent of self and world transformation. Consequently, it is posited that all mental processes of ideational activity are demonstrations of the thinking substance in man which point to a new direction in the discourse on contemporary philosophy of mind. The discourse on mind in recent times appears to be pointing towards the direction of how the powers of the human mind can be harnessed for problem solving and decision making. The new face of philosophy of mind has departed from the dualistic quagmire which Descartes and the materialists placed it. It is no longer whether the mind exists or not. It is no longer whether the material is superior to the mental or not. Those issues have become spent forces to contemporary scholarship. Instead, it is now talking about how to tap the immense metaphysical potentialities of the mind towards meaning making. The world is gradually shifting away from the burden of physical gadgets and is beginning to think of how to get task executed without necessary entangling in the drudgery of gadgets. On this, the mind has been established to have the ability to usher humanity into the desired new world. Thus, the call for societies to invest more resources into the development of the mind for universe building because a developed mind gives birth to a developed system, vice versa.

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