

The Usual Kind of Reason that People Apply: Being Situated in Vernacular Language and Lived Experience

Taye Birhanu Taressa

PhD Candidate, Department of Philosophy, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
Visiting Research Student, Department of Philosophy, Center for European Philosophy, University of Antwerp, Antwerp, Belgium
Corresponding Author Email: tayex2014@gmail.com

Abstract

World view and public philosophy of a particular cultural group or society is embedded in its vernacular language and lived experience. Lived experience is very important in holding together the connection between a thing and its meaning. An attempt to judge a particular cultural practice and knowledge's rationality without being aware of its primary values and beliefs would go the risk of misinterpreting and distorting. There must be a room for a diversified conception of rationality to creating a better world and/or enhancing humanity. In contrary, to what has been the case with in the so called "post-colonial Africa" the mental, spiritual, and emotional aspect of independence should have been given priority followed by the physical aspect of independence. Most emphasis for African philosophy must be constructing and re-constructing the indigenous knowledge and world views of African societies. This could be followed by less emphasis on deconstructing the deliberate prejudices and distortions prevailed in the then physical colonizers and the present mental and spiritual colonizers of Africa. Methodologically, this article has been grounded on arguments for vernacular language and lived experiences as elated to ordinary reasons, followed by anticipated objections and counter arguments or replies as this is a philosophy paper.

Keywords

Lived experience, usual kind of reason, vernacular language.

INTRODUCTION

This article is an expository and critical of the second chapter of Emmanuel C. Eze's book, entitled, "On Reason: Rationality in a world of Cultural Conflict and Racism" [1]. The title of the chapter under consideration is "Ordinary Historical Reason." After thorough reading and PhD class presentation of this second chapter of the book I gave my article another title, which is *The Usual Kind of Reason that People Apply: Would It Be Thinkable without Being Situated in Vernacular Language and Lived Experience?*

This article consists of five parts. The first part deals with the claim that a thing would conjoin its meaning; when interpreted from the point of view of the vernacular language and lived experiences of the person in need of knowing what the thing means.

The second part presents the view that an attempt to judge a particular cultural practice and knowledge's rationality from the outside; (not being adequately informed of the built-in values and beliefs) would go the risk of misinterpreting and distorting the primary reasons on which that rationality was founded.

The third part deals with the idea that we need to accept that the reasons people apply in everyday life are caused for their very existence by diversified vernacular language and lived experiences. And this would significantly contribute to creating a better world; by making possible the availability of unique and adequately representing views around the table (about what matters in life). What matters in life would

unsurprisingly vary from one part of the world to the other.

The fourth part of this study is devoted to establishing the claim that the postcolonial theory and practice seems to prioritize the physical aspect of independence and liberty. And this has been the case at the expense of the more critical (mental and spiritual) independence and freedom.

Finally, the fifth part (conclusions) presents the main arguments of this article and some takeaways from such claims within the framework of African philosophy.

THE ROLE OF VERNACULAR LANGUAGE AND LIVED EXPERIENCE IN ADDRESSING THE ISSUE OF CONNECTING A THING WITH ITS MEANING

One of the themes of the second chapter of Emmanuel C. Eze's book [1] is the problem of conjoining a thing with its meaning. Though this philosophical problem could be encountered elsewhere, the extent to which it affects one's thought about a meaning of thing significantly diminishes as the person subscribes to context of her/his own vernacular language and lived experience.

Due to multiple factors such as suitable environment, weather condition, economic growth, and development, and the like; there are things that may exist only in some part of the world. By the same token, the other parts of the world might be occupied with things that do not exist in that part of the world that I have referred to in the last sentence. And this makes it easier for the ones who had physical presence with the thing in a particular time and space to grasp what it is meant by the thing.

To be more concrete, world view and public philosophy of a particular cultural group or society is embedded in its vernacular language and lived experience. Emmanuel C. Eze paraphrases Wredu's argument to defend this view, stating "... the causal laws of nature are, logically speaking, continuously anchored in the normative requirements of concepts and of the grammatical, sentential structures of languages" [1]. Here, let us see some cases that are related to the issue of vernacular language and turn to the cases that are relevant to that of lived experience in next paragraph. There are things and thoughts whose good picture a person could have in mind as a native, and yet may not be able to explain to strangers. Lin Ma and Jaap van Brake argue:

No matter what philosophy is it cannot be independent of a particular (natural) language. The philosopher may try to overcome this limitation or deny that thinking is dependent on language, but it remains a fact that he/she uses a particular language when making these views known to others [2].

This is because the native person has got enormous opportunities of holding the things, knowing their attributes at the nearest in time and space, and sharing the thoughts at ease with fellow native individuals. Sometimes, it might even be difficult, for a native speaker a vernacular language to explain about things and thoughts that seem very clear in one's mind to another native person (of the same language). However, the difficulty of being understood between two natives would be worsened when it comes to the case of a native and foreigner. Eze states:

[T]he Continentalist says that if there is a nonlinguistic or non-imagined realm to nature, we cannot have cognitive access to it except through language or the idea of an image. This position is not inspired by metaphysics but by studies of structures of grammar and their relation to logic of perception [1].

Lived experience is very important in holding together the connection between a thing and its meaning. For example, 'injera' is a uniquely staple food for almost all Ethiopians. As a result, most Ethiopians are familiar with the ingredients that make it up, how it should be prepared, how it tastes, its smell, and so on. Therefore, it would be quite easier for an Ethiopian to connect the meaning of 'injera' with the 'injera' that she/he knows in the lived experiences as compared to a foreigner who lacked the lived experience regarding 'injera'. There are also acts that could be learnt best by doing them. For instance, riding horse, herding cattle, hunting, providing first aid, and so on and so forth could be best learnt by doing. Hence, their meanings would be empty without lived experiences of the one who attempts to ascribe a meaning to these sorts of acts.

THE EFFECT OF JUDGING A PARTICULAR CULTURAL GROUP'S PRACTICE AND KNOWLEDGE'S RATIONALITY MERELY FROM OUTSIDE

There are certain values and beliefs that are embedded in each society's world view, practice, and knowledge. For

example, the 'Irreechaa', which literally means 'an indigenous annual thanksgiving to God festival moving either near to a hill or lake holding a green grass', that has been popularly celebrated by the Oromo people of Ethiopia was distorted and misinterpreted by those who were unaware of the values and beliefs on which it was founded. Some tend to portray 'Irreechaa' as amounting to worship the natural settings like **hill**, **lake**, and **green grass** (what the Oromo people call 'tulluu', 'malkaa' and 'marga jiidhaa' respectively).

However, the hill, lake and green grass are what this indigenous cultural group had been utilizing as primary reasons to thank God whom they believe had created those wonderful natural settings; in contrary to the prejudice as if the hill and lake themselves were being worshipped. And I believe, this is tantamount to irrationalizing the rational; without being aware of the very reasons that caused that rational thing to exist. According to Franz M. Wimmer, "the relevance of cultural traditions for the present and the future must be analyzed. The first step, again, will be to reconstruct different traditions of thought in a comprehensive and differentiated way" [3].

Therefore, an attempt to judge a particular cultural practice and knowledge's; being unaware of such values and beliefs would go the risk of misinterpreting and distorting the primary reasons on which the rationality was founded. Instead, it would be plausible, first, to attempt to become aware of the bigger picture by paying attention to the values and beliefs as well as the primary reasons that caused the existence of the rationality to be judged.

REASONS PEOPLE APPLY IN EVERYDAY LIFE ARE DIVERSIFIED DUE TO VARYING VERNACULAR LANGUAGES AND LIVED EXPERIENCES

For the possibility of plural knowledge and practices, one must accept the fact that the reasons people apply in everyday life are caused for their very existence by diversified vernacular languages and lived experiences. And this would significantly contribute to creating a better world; by making possible the availability of unique and adequately representing views around the table (about what matters in life). Eze argues "each community and nation has enough "rules of thumb" in experience to guide it in its judgments about good and bad, or useful and useless practices of politics or development" [1].

What matters in life would unsurprisingly vary from one part of the world to the other. For example, as a matter of fact, there are some societies where most or many of its members had make up their mind for waging war on their groups perceived and actual enemies at any cost for the sake of securing their society's interests (like political and cultural hegemony). As a result, what matters often, for this kind of society is how to train brave warriors, how to accumulate military arsenals, strategies for creating more enemies to their enemies and making the enemy of their enemy their friend, and the like.

In contrary to the above society, we could find another society whose most or many members seek perpetual peace of the world in general and that of their environment in particular. For this kind of society, what matters most in life unlike the warmongers would be teaching their offspring about brotherhood, compromising, forgiveness, mutual benefit and existence, positive peace, fair and just distribution of benefits and burdens, and so on and so forth.

Imagine what would happen, if the whole world subscribes to the mentality (perceived rationality) of the war liking group. The consequence would be zero-sum game. However, if diversified conception of rationality is something to be welcomed; there exists the possibility of even taking important lessons from the warmonger society that that way is not something worth doing or must be refrained from. Eze relates:

Nothing in the theory of dis-quotationality therefore diminishes the soundness of arguments in favor of my idea of an intrinsic diversity of rational expressions. Implicit also in the vernacular theory of the language of ordinary reason is a related proposition: that reason is not only internally dialectical and externally social but also is co-constitutive of the objectivity of the world [1].

Therefore, it would be plausible; to conclude that leaving some space for diversified conception of rationality promotes win-win situation, thereby contributing to the mega project of creating a better world and/or enhancing humanity.

WHY THE POSTCOLONIAL THEORY AND PRACTICE SEEM TO PRIORITIZE THE PHYSICAL ASPECT OF INDEPENDENCE AND LIBERTY?

I contend that the term “postcolonial” must not be used in its general and broader sense when it comes to characterize the period that it intends to represent within the context of Africa. The main reason for this claim is that the postcolonial theory and practice in socio-economic, cultural, and political aspects seem to give more emphasis to the physical notion of independence and liberty at the expense of the mental and spiritual autonomy and freedom.

The physical aspect of independence and liberty might be characterized by replacement of colonizers’ institutions and personnel with that of the colonized personnel and bureaucrats. And most of the time the marginalized society tend to be deceived with this kind of independence, especially at the very beginning of such aspect of decolonization. However, this kind of independence would not be genuine without being reinforced by the most critical aspect of human autonomy, i.e. the mental, emotional, and spiritual aspect of independence. I believe the so called “post-colonial Africa” as most would conventionally call it could be best identified the mere physical aspect of independence.

For example, almost all African countries that were under colony got their physical aspect of independence at the very beginning of the second half of the twentieth century. However, up until today, the vernacular language, ways of

life, the working language, the regular food, dressing styles, curriculum, and other values and beliefs of the then physical colonizers and the present mental and spiritual colonizers are being well at work. Kwasi Wiredu asserts:

African who has learned philosophy in English, for example, has most likely become conceptually largely westernized not by choice but by the force of historical circumstances. To that same extent he may have become de-Africanized. It does not matter if the philosophy learned was African philosophy [4].

The most critical aspect of independence (mental, spiritual, and emotional) includes relying on one’s own indigenous values and beliefs, world views, vernacular language, lived experiences, and creative mental properties such as arts, music, and literature to societal well-being. The mental, spiritual, and emotional aspect of independence has been deliberately suppressed by the colonizers and ill-conceived by the marginalized as if it was secured simultaneously with that of the physical aspect of independence. And yet the former is more critical and would overweight the latter. In other words, in contrary, to what has been the case with in the so called “post-colonial Africa” the mental, spiritual, and emotional aspect of independence should have been given priority followed by the physical aspect of independence as well-thought-out idea and theory would result in effective practical implementation.

CONCLUSIONS

World view and public philosophy of a particular cultural group or society is embedded in its vernacular language and lived experience. This is because the native person has got enormous opportunities of holding the things, knowing their attributes at the nearest in time and space. And this would enable her/him to sharing the thoughts at ease with fellow native individuals. Hence, lived experience is very important in holding together the connection between a thing and its meaning. Inter-cultural and ethnophilosophical studies show that language and lived experience greatly shape meanings [5] [6].

An attempt to judge a particular cultural practice and knowledge’s rationality without being aware of its primary values and beliefs would go the risk of misinterpreting and distorting. Instead, it would be plausible, first, to attempt to become aware of the bigger picture by paying attention to the values and beliefs as well as the primary reasons that caused the very existence of the rationality to be judged.

There must be a room for a diversified conception of rationality that would promote win-win situation; thereby contributing to the project of creating a better world and/or enhancing humanity. In the words of Columbus N. Ogbujah & Nympha U. Nkama:

In the wake of discoveries in analytic thinking and Ethno-philosophy, that besides western European culture, there exist equally other well-developed traditions, it becomes imperative to question the ostensibly imperialistic posturing of Eurocentric presuppositions [7].

In contrary, to what has been the case with in the so called “post-colonial Africa” the mental, spiritual, and emotional aspect of independence should have been given priority followed by the physical aspect of independence. Because well-thought-out idea and theory would result in an effective practical implementation. Relevant previous studies also confirm this claim [8] [9] [10].

Therefore, the most emphasis for African philosophy must be constructing and re-constructing the indigenous knowledge and world views of African societies. This could be followed by less emphasis on deconstructing the deliberate prejudices and distortions prevailed in the then physical colonizers and the present mental and spiritual colonizers of Africa.

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