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THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF LIVING AN ISOLATED EXISTENCE: METAPHYSICAL IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract

Man has since his evolution grown one stage of his socio-economic and socio-political existence to another. Through the ages of man's development, one thing has remained sacrosanct; that is man's interaction with one another. The existence of man has shown that in the nature of man, man has unlimited wants or insatiable needs, howbeit, his limited resources cannot proffer all that man may want or need at any given time, place and circumstances. The fact that man has limited resources which are unequally distributed by nature, invention and innovation, it follows that what one man has but does not need it, another man lacks, and needs it. This became the inception of trade, exchange and eventual confirmation of the impossibility of living an isolated existence. From the foregoing; it is ideal to assert that 'no man is an island', which implies that no man can exist on his own, providing all he may need and want and still survives in the average expectation of survival. The statement that 'no man can exist on his own' should rather be read as "it is impossible for a man to exist on his own". This is to say, although one may live an isolated existence, it is impossible for one to live in an isolated existence and even in situations where it happens, it is accompanied with serious metaphysical implications. Therefore, this paper tends to make a discourse on the impossibility of living an isolated existence, with peculiar attention on the metaphysical implications of such.

Keywords: *Metaphysical, Isolated, Man, Implications, Existence, Impossibility.*

Introduction

The world where humans live is one which is composed of both material and spiritual configuration. Philosophically, it could be said that the world is physical and metaphysical in nature. Man is connected to and surrounded by nature and other events which build up his social life and well-being via innumerable properties which are features of the physical and metaphysical world (Internet). The daily interaction which man has with himself and the things around him in the physical and metaphysical being is what may be termed as "life". It is a life that brings man to experience the features of both the physical and metaphysical surroundings where he lives his life. In this life experience, there is a part of it that is developed by man's dependence and interaction with other co-habitant of the world; and that is termed as a social effect. And it has been asserted that the social effect depends on the rate of connection and involvement which man has with the co-habitant in a whole (Cacioppo & Hawley, 2009).

The way and manner in which the world is conceived by man are depending on an individual's conception and adaptation to the institutions, relationships, and other activities existing in the world. Relationships, institutions and man's involvement and connection to them in addition to the necessary life activities go to a large extent to determine the survival of man in the world

where man finds himself (Hawkley, Hughes, & Waite, 2008). The activities which man involves himself in the world are often based on the needs and aims of a man at any given time. The needs are formulated in accordance with man's dependence on the world for provisional necessities, and the things which man expects of the world. When a man is lacking or falling short of the needs, it often affects the reactions and actions of man, which often result in man's discontentment and perhaps, disillusionment (Segrin, 1999).

Philosophers, be they the ancient, medieval or modern have a common belief about the man and the society. This belief is that no solution can be offered to man's need or problem unless there is a comprehensive understanding and effectual statement concerning the pertinent relationship between man and society. When mention is made of the society, it does not imply a distinct entity existing at a given place and time. The society is a collective form of existence which overtime has become a core component of man's existence. The collectivity may be seen in the form of family, social groups, and bounds of other co-existing factors (Internet).

One fact is that man as an individual has specific features and needs which are usually distinct from that of other individuals in the collective whole. This is what distinguishes one man from another. These specific features are not constant but change in consonance with time, place, circumstances and the reactive or non-reactive responses of other members of the collective whole. However, for the collective survival of man, man tends to compromise certain aspects of his specific features and needs to make room for the collective features and needs which are common amongst individuals in the society. Findings show that if a man is uptight about keeping to his features and needs as against the collective features, the man may not successfully survive or exist excitedly (Segrin, 1999).

In the collective features, there are often sorts of responsibilities which cannot be performed by one man at any given time or place or at all times and places. This implies that there is a definite proportion of the responsibilities in the society which are commonly shared naturally or by nurture since man as an individual cannot solve all his unlimited needs with his limited resources and inability to perform all necessary responsibilities required for his survival. The responsibilities are shared in accordance with the age and gender of the individual, as well as the phenomenal skills acquired by man either by nature or by nurture. To this end, man's survival is highly knitted to the assimilation of the collective features, as that is what bonds mansociologically and psychologically. This is why it has been postulated that irrespective how complete a man may be by himself, with himself and for himself, it is impossible for man to live in an isolated existence (Cacioppo, and Patrick, 2008).

From the foregoing, it is easier to assert that the affairs and activities of man in the society are often not regulated solely by the individual man himself, as there are other social factors, standards, and collective responsibilities which are the propelling factors for the actions, inactions, and reactions of man in the society. This may also mean that over time, man has been constructed and formatted to a social being that has to co-exist and co-habit in tenets of his survival and existence (Cacioppo, Amaral, and Blanchard, 2007). These brought the popular aphorism that just like the river carries the boat, the society carries man. Just like the boat can choose to remain instead, harbour or set out to sail, man can decide to remain in his own enclave, and does nothing. Again, just like the boat can also sail and attain usefulness, man can also live to assimilate with the society and do something. The tragedy is that just like the river helps the boat to sail, by other inadvertent factors can also sink the boat, the society can also mar or make

the man. However, a boat cannot for fear of sinking, remain anchored at the harbour as that would defeat its purposes and usefulness. Thus, man cannot for fear of societal factors, be in isolation.

Wholly, we have been able to lay the foundation to the assertion about the impossibility of living an isolated existence; thus, the relevance of this paper. This paper attempts to make a discourse that it is impossible for man to live an isolated existence, and even where man attempts to live an isolated existence, there are always implications and consequences; and for this purposes of this paper, the research attention will be more on the metaphysical implications of an isolated existence.

Isolated Existence

Popular opinions, observations and findings show that human life in the society is impossible unless there is a sort of social interactions and relations. In furtherance of the findings, it is posited that there are necessities for the survival of man and that these necessities cannot be gotten unless through a sort of societal support. In the findings of one of the earliest philosophers or thinkers, Aristotle, as he is known, opined that man is an animal, not just any kind of animal but a social animal by nature (Internet). The opinion of Aristotle is to the effect of the necessities of relationship, interactions and human interdependencies on other humans in the form of co-existence. In elongation of the assertion of Aristotle, one can say that the existence of man in the society is one in which man is bound in certain ways, and these ways are those of relationship, interactions, co-existence and dependencies.

Notwithstanding, it could be said that it is not all persons in the world or a given society that feel the vitality of this co-existence, relationships, interactions and interdependencies; thus, there are persons who dislodge the idea of co-existence or interdependencies. These persons voluntarily or conditionally ascribe to be left alone as they prefer isolation from society than any form of bonding with society. Anyone in that stead is said or assumed to be living an isolated existence (Hawkley, Hughes, and Waite, 2008).

Isolated existence may be referred to an absolute or near-absolute void of interaction or interdependence with the other members of social web-society for one reason or the other or for no reason that may justify the circumstance. Isolated existence can be voluntary, that is self-inflicted sort of isolation or involuntary, that imposed on a person by way of confinement, quarantine or abduction. Isolated existence is distinguished from loneliness; this is because, in loneliness, there is a sort of interaction and social interdependence, but not to the level in which the individual yearns for or needs. In isolated existence, the individual shuts himself or shut off from any interaction, relationship and interdependent roles with other humans in the society over a given period of time, usually keeping to himself in a distant or locations where he will be inaccessible by others (Goldsmith, Pellmar, Kleinman, and Bunney, 2002).

Isolated existence varies in degree and form. Whereas some cases of isolated existence may fathom as being minor or mild, there are others which are at the extreme and is overt when weighed with other factors and needs. Isolated existence may be seen in a minor way when an individual decides to stay in his or her home over a period of time. The individual in such self-seclusion from the society tries to avoid any form of social contact interaction with others, including close family relatives, friends and acquaintances. Observations show that more than 60 per cent of persons who were found in such mood and circumstances were persons suffering

from one addiction or the other (usually drug addiction) and depression. On this minor form of isolated existence, it was found that even where these persons on isolated living have any form of interaction, it is often short, weird and unwelcoming. On the extreme or overt form of isolated existence is where a person tends to stay away from home or off from human habitable areas and shuts himself off from any form of human contacts and interaction and in more severe cases, from any natural being or technologically built objects (Cacioppo, & Hawkley, 2009).

Whatever forms the isolated existence is, it tends to cause some issues and becomes overtime a problematic issue to the person concerned. These issues range from feelings of loneliness, sense of loss, depression, phobia of others, low or poor self-esteem, psychological trauma, loss of memory, human hatred, societal distaste, disillusionment and disenchantment and climax of it being suicide. Some scholars have tried to assemble some obvious factors which may be the cause of isolated existence, which hugely rest on technological innovations which impairs the relevance of human relationship, interactions and interdependence. These scholars subscribe to the belief that the issues of isolated existence would not be as alarming as it tends to be in the present dispensation if not for the overhauling usages of modern technology which dislodges human interactions and cause the man to distance himself from one another (Cacioppo, Patrick, 2008).

Another set of scholars disproves the assertion stated above. This set is of the opinion that the technological innovations in forms of internet, mobile phones and the inception of internet activated social networking applications, human beings are brought closer to each other than ever before. The issue of distance no longer arises as one can communicate with another through these innovations at any time, place and conditions. To them, the technological innovation makes the world handy to an individual. However, empirical findings have shown on a scale of 6/10 that the use of these technological innovations in whatever forms or manners make the users incline more to himself which tends to lead to an isolated existence in the long run (Hawkley, Hughes & Waite, 2008).

From the foregoing discourse, it is imperative to state that humans can live alone or can live in an isolated existence, what matters is whether they can survive to live alone or to live in an isolated existence; it is to the second statement that this paper laments that it is impossible to survive to live alone or living in an isolated existence; thus the impossibility of living an isolated existence; and the paper maintains that attempt at living an isolated existence at whatever forms have implications and the researcher shall proceed in the next part of this paper to discuss the metaphysical implications of living an isolated existence.

Metaphysical Implications

Humans are social being who greatly depend on a secure social environment and interaction for their survival and being. It follows that any form of isolated existence would have an effect on the human being. The effects may be a heightened fear of security and vigilance, feelings of being vulnerable in underlying conditions, social threats, and may aggravate to sleep disorders, time distortions, psychological trauma and shock, social malfunctioning, hallucinations and health impairments. This paper seeks to discuss within the limited space the metaphysical implications of living an isolated existence. It is metaphysical in the sense that it implies an idea, doctrine, or postulated reality that is outside human sense knowledge. It within the domain of things that cannot be accessed by the human sense perception.

To begin with, the researcher lifts the observations and findings made in a study about one Sarah Shourd who was kept in incarceration for about two months in an isolated condition. The observations show that Sarah's mind began to suffer from various of distortions and disorders. Sarah affirmed that she usually hear phantom footsteps and saw lights flashes, and in her quest to reconnect to the real world, most part of her day were spent by her lying close to the entrance so as to listen through the little opening at the entrance spent most of her day crouched on all fours, listening through a gap in the door. While in confinement, Sarah Shourd spent about 10,000 (Ten thousand) hours with little or no human contact or interaction, upon her release, she continually suffered from hallucinations and disturbing imaginations and nightmares (Internet).

Sarah stated in her interview with the New York Times in 2011 that she often had a short vision of things coming upon her in the form of different shades of flashing lights, and if she turns or jerks her head; that was when she would notice that it was all in her imaginations. She stated that sometimes she would hear loud screaming and it would only take an intervention for her to notice that she had been the one screaming all along.

There are times in our human endeavours when we wish to be on our own without any form of human connection, but, it can never be in the form of wholesome isolation. Observations show that isolated existence can have a serious mental effect on most people who are exposed to it. Taking a glimpse from the first-hand report and experience of Sarah Shroud in the hands of Iraqi military operations, it is obvious that the effects consist of psychological impairments and sensory deprivation.

Another study on the metaphysical implications of living an isolated existence is the study which was carried out at McGill University Medical Center in Montreal, which was headed by a psychologist known as Donald Heb. In the study, paid volunteers who are majorly college students were separately placed in sound-proof cubicles, where they were disconnected from any form of human interaction or contact. The researchers also minimized the things which these participants could feel, see, hear, touch, etc. The reports of the study as published in the Scientific American magazine conveyed that after few hours from the commencement time of the experimental study, the participants were severely and acutely restless and were craving for stimulation, risen adrenaline and anxious emotional feelings (Internet).

Most glaringly was that the arithmetic which they were asked to solve prior to them being placed in isolation was also given to them to solve immediately after the isolation, and it was found that they could not attempt it correctly as they have done prior to the isolated existence. That tends to show the mental instability caused by isolated existence. This experimentation only lasted for just a short while, and the effects were this disturbing, howbeit how the effects would be when it lasts longer or when it is a real isolated existence and not an experiment (Internet).

The research headed by Hebb was meant to last for several weeks, but the experimentation was stopped owing to the adverse effects on the participants. The head researcher stated that from the laboratory experience and observations, the mere taking away of the sights, sounds, and human contacts which the participants are used to having for just a few days got them shaking and devastated as none of them lasted up to a week in the isolated existence. In 2008, Ian Robbins placed six volunteers in isolated existence for only 48 hours in a sound-proofed room, and it was observed that the volunteers suffered mental malfunctioning, extreme emotions, paranoia and anxiety and hallucination (Internet).

The effects and implications of isolated existence differ based on time, circumstances and other relative factors. The observations of life example and experience of a French geologist who at the age of 23-years-old, voluntarily made up his mind to stay a period of 2 months in an isolated existence in a cave; will be handy. The observations show that the man did not suffer from any identifiable trauma or breakdown. However, the same French geologist decided to carry out such experiment again after ten years in 1972, and the effects were so devastating. He was driven to near insanity, emotional disruption and loss of memory (Internet).

Time distortion is also a noticeable outcome of isolated existence, as, on one occasion, it took the man about five minutes to count 120 seconds. This is usually as a result of the mind being under the influence of powerful psychedelic compounds. However, it may also occur in an organic way if the mind is left alone for an extremely large period of time. When the geologist began to show forth signs of failed experimentation, the rescue team went in to get him out from the isolated existence, and it was readily observed that His bodily systems were out of balance with cycling that is radical and unpredictable, which suggest aptly that there were really physiological and sociological needs for others which were not provided for in the isolated existence (Internet).

More than 400 years ago, a British poet known as John Donne recognized the importance of human interdependence and the implications of living an isolated existence, he penned down a poem which is popularly used in the world today. The title of the poem is “No man is an Island” (Internet)

Conclusion

The societal structure demands that human beings ought to maintain a certain level of connection, contact and interaction with one another in order to successfully exist. Sometimes, the societal structures seem excessively demanding and strength-sapping on the individual to that the extent that the individual does not feel like being interested in any continuous contact, connection or interaction, at least, for a given period of time. This may be as a result of failed or collapsed relationship, academic failures and exaggerations, socio-political instability, socio-economic disparities or socio-cultural disintegration. In all these the man found himself not being in need of any other person for his survival or as a result of certain life negation, the individual has already assumed the worst that would happen to him if he should take a voyage in isolated existence, and he found the worst effect as the best that would happen to him than what he experiences currently in the world where he lives in. These and other relative factors could drive a man to choose isolated existence over communal or interactive existence.

But this paper intimates that living in an isolated existence is impossible (this by implication means that one cannot hopefully survive in an isolated existence as he would have in an interdependent co-existence). However, where one primarily survives to live in an isolated existence, there are metaphysical implications which are consequential effects of an isolated existence. These implications are called metaphysical because they are over and beyond physics. The metaphysical implications remove the humanity and wholesome man in an individual, by lots of spiritually related issues or disruptions that are only present in his mind and psychology which are not physically seen and explainable.

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