



REPRESENTING OBJECTIVITY

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ABSTRACT:- This work needed to be done in order to throw more light on the nature of the concept of objectivity which is vital to much philosophical discuss. Those who will benefit from this study are those who as philosophers, scientists and humanists think that objectivity is a term given without much to worry about. What was done in this study was a critical perusal of the concept of objectivity with a view to unveiling the true nature of the concept of objectivity. How this was done was through a serious perusal of existing literature on objectivity. When this was done, it became readily obvious that the concept of objectivity is less than always thought; that objectivity obviously had something to hide. This was worked out through a critical analysis. This was done to the extent of establishing in unmistakable points of argument that objectivity is always other than most people would think. The implication of this for research is that concepts such as objectivity should not be taken for granted as is usually the case. The implication of this in practice is that people should always be suspicious of concepts which meaning seems to promise so much. However, more is yet needed to be done in the area in order to unveil issues involved in appropriation of concepts such as objectivity.

KEYWORDS:-

- 1) Objectivity: one, objectivity is indicative of the existence of things *in ce* and independent of human mind but realizable, two, objectivity is capacity for impartiality in judgment and three, objectivity is the ability to elevate judgment beyond personal prejudices.
- 2) Egocentric: It is used here to imply the unavoidably personal nature of one's experiences, percepts of the external world and the existing things around one and also the unavoidable manifestation of one's person in one's engagement with the rest of existence.
- 3) Representing: This as used in this study is taken to mean critical elaboration and exposition.

I. REPRESENTING OBJECTIVITY

Man normally concluded that objectivity in knowledge of existence (as it is) could be attained through some methods. Such informed man's "objective knowledge" which he brandished even where and when he ought not to shout "eureka" but bow in faith since he certainly, knows nothing. History indicates that it is in that which man called "objective knowledge" that he re-interprets the ways of nature to suit his own artificial ways, an abuse of nature. But also there is a rush feeling that the concept called objectivity like other concepts has something sinister, which it must hide to avoid being undone. This feeling has persisted.

The problem on hand is a philosophical one. But, it is concrete and obviously calls for wariness and meticulous use of language especially "in an age when useful abstractions have become more real and more significant than... concrete realities" (Fallico: 1962; VIII). More so is it true that since philosophy delves into intellectual contemplation of the overall realities regarding the nature of being it has become necessary that it becomes, away from semantics, more and more practical. This study seeks to closely and critically peruse, elaborate and expose the concept of objectivity itself to elucidate; clarify it, with a view to laying bare its real nature and operational ambits. It is possible that there is error in conception and application of the concept of objectivity.

This study has the purely academic purpose. The aim behind it all is to demystify philosophy in order to enhance its praxis. Philosophy has come of age and needs to be taken out of the corridors and insides of university class rooms and the uncountable pages of numberless old and new books into the society for practical purposes. To do this effectively philosophy needs to be dressed a little in a fashion the society can be interested in. It is the purpose of this study to investigate critically and lay bare the concept of objectivity. To, that is, discover whether these much ado is about nothing, whether objectivity is really realizable.

This work is significant in the sense of showing that the concept objectivity is to be seen to be just as any other abstract concept, better left uninvestigated. It showed that objectivity may have its royal robes soiled if ever it attempted coming too close. That is to say, that it may have little to offer. Hence, perusing the

objectivity principle may appear sacrilegious but no attempt would be spared in throwing open the door to its false, empty sanctuary that smacks of smelly stinky despair. That this in the main generates the problem of objectivity is the contribution this study seeks ardently to make.

Since this is essentially a study in philosophy the method must not be dogmatic – rigid system of standard prescriptions and techniques. The method of this study is partly analytical and partly descriptive, but in the main analytical. As in all philosophical study this method is expected to play the role of “a general system of assumptions and guidelines” (Spirkin: 1981:39) through which the purpose of the study would be realized. Why must this study adopt a peculiar method? This is because: “A methodology is a system of principles and general ways of organizing and structuring theoretical and practical activity and also the theory of this system (Spirkin, 1981; 35). Therefore, the question of whether a philosophical research method is empirical, descriptive, analytic etc. should not arise – any peculiar problems as in philosophy should be allowed to adopt methods peculiar and appropriate to its end.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Objectivity presupposes (compare Aja: 1993) the existence of objects outside the knowing mind. Read him – “Objects are independent of the mind and present their properties directly to the knower through sense data... things known and sense data are one” (p. 30). He is an epistemological monist. Forms of objectivity, he observed, are: one, Naïve or common sense realism (things being perceived as they are), two, new realism (the objective world in containing “mental and material entities and objective relations” is neutral), three, new materialism (the objective world is material) and, four, neo-thomism (that an independent real world is known by independently real minds).

The scientist Ziman (1968:40) conceived objectivity as nothing more than publicly verifiable and repeatability but for Spirkin (1983) it is a materialistic principle in which all reliably established “concepts, categories, propositions, inferences, laws and theories” have evidently objective making not in the least dependent on human desert. Taking the world as seen is deficiency in knowing because the world in this sense “is not” apart from man and his “sense perception”. This is the position of objective materialists of which Spirkin is one.

According to him, too, objectivity could be idealistic hence, Objective idealists recognize the existence of a real world outside man, but believe that the world is based on reason, that is ruled by certain omnipotent ideas which guide everything (p. 30). This form of objectivity according to him (pp. 32-3) obtains when abstract concept resulted from reasoning about the essence of a thing. Such concept came not to be regarded as the impression of a thing but as something objectively there, contained in the thing and determines the thing – its structure, properties and relationships and even continued existence of the thing after such things is destroyed.

Hence, Bittle (1960: 150) saw idealism as a child of the hurdle in cognizing how the human mind goes beyond itself to cognize reality outside it. This is what Eboh (1995; 75) aptly put as an attempt to explain the dualism of subject-object, knower-known, mind-matter and position of man in the game of world chessboard. He further held that objective or subjective – idealism repudiates the existence of the external world in itself devoid of a knowing mind. Mind, in his, view precedes matter, creates it, spiritualizes it and divinizes nature.

According to Harold (1970:224) objectivity as material is the Marxian sense of evolution into consciousness of matter and objectivity as mental is the Hegelian sense of world reason (mind), which expresses itself in matter. However, for Fichte (Alpern; 1933:245), the founder of German subjective idealism, objectivity hence the objective world is a mental creation which dialectically evolves thus: -

Thesis: The Ego creates itself; it affirms itself as a subject.

Anti-Thesis: In affirming itself it must produce or set-up the non Ego, the so called objective world - here it negates itself.

Synthesis: The Ego and non Ego enter into relations of the knower and known, completing the act of knowledge, of thought.

Therefore devoid of the knowing mind, Fichte seems to be saying, there could be no objectivity.

Hegel (Alpern: 1933) held the objective mind to be the collective mind of one’s fellow men, the society which limits the individual Ego. Therefore objectivity for him lies in realizing this collective mind or as the case might be, the collective mind internalized in the individual mind or consciousness.

III. PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

From the above, the concept of objectivity is indicative of the existence of things *in se* and independent of human mind but realizable, objectivity is capacity for impartiality in judgment and objectivity is the ability to elevate judgment beyond personal prejudices. But, never did it seem pertinent to critically study the nature of objectivity as a concept. But to leave this out entirely is to fall easy prey to criticism. Therefore, as epistemology seeks to relate knowledge to truth, belief, opinions; skepticism etc. in order to unveil their real nature it must as a prerequisite lay bare the exact nature of objectivity.

If, by philosophical problem one means the ever yawning gap between explication, explanation on one hand and acceptance on another occasioned not by lack of facts but by factors such as high theoretical base and high-pitched abstraction etc. then objectivity is one. This is so especially as it concerns objectivity taken in the primary sense of indicative of existence of reality *in se* and independent of the human mind but realizable. Therefore, the problem of this study remains to show that the concept of objectivity is like the apparently virgin maiden but who is really highly flirtatious, treacherous and villainous that may have enticed and led many unsuspecting acquaintances unto destruction. This is no empty accusation verbosely steeped, portentous of slander, and libelous, because that the objectivity problem, as all philosophical problems, derive from the treatment of concepts as having definite contents where in actual sense they are not is what this study seeks to establish. This is hoped to be achieved in three moments of genuine arguments as here below.

IV. OBJECTIVITY AS EPISTEMOLOGICAL PROBLEM

Let us start with argument from the problem of the independent reality of the external world and knowledge of it. This argument is based on Joad's *Philosophy* (1960 impression) especially in his treatment of the rationalist and empiricist's arguments against the independent reality of the external world. Thus, observing the conclusions of this argument with only a little twist the reality away from human mind in which objectivity is supposed to inhere is Vanity Fair.

One, unless objectivity refers to an objective world realizable in thought only (but then that would make it human mind dependent), the physicist is yearning and too willing to dash the concept of objectivity based on conviction issuing from facts of testing ground. For him, grant that the external reality to which objectivity refers is material, then his proof is on hand that matter can be indefinitely divisible such that substances could be devoid of color smell, solidity, temperature etc. in which the nature of substances are thought to inhere. If no fixable external reality in which objectivity is supposed to inhere exists as such then continued stress on objectivity as such is illusory. One may argue in the form that,

when the physicist falls in love, an event which must presumably on occasion happen to physicists and feels impelled to kiss the girl he loves, does he, one wonders, really believe that these lips, rich red, ripe, curved and soft which offer themselves so sweetly to his own are nothing but charges of electricity in motion and are therefore, in their real nature neither rich, nor red, nor ripe, nor curved, nor soft? Of course he does not. Yet this, if he takes his physics seriously is presumably what he ought to believe (Joad: 1960:92).

But, this argument is seriously fallacious – it attacks not the argument but the person. Thus, one is left with the disturbing truth that the familiar world may never be objectively there to serve as the sanctuary to which objectivity refers which indicates a reality existing “in se” away from human mind and capable of being realized. One however could rather argue that reality in itself which objectivity principle is rested on could only be a brutality occasioned by absurd limitation of knowledge.

To further buttress the stand of the physicists, consider physiology. The much one can know or call existing substances are limited to what one can actually know based on the medium. The substances called men under power microscope become nothing but bubbles suspected to be electric charges. Who knows what a more superior instrument would see. That one cannot know the vast multitude of the world of microbes does not prevent its existence being forced on one by infections such as typhoid fever and HIV virus which gives AIDS (Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome). But, just like the simplest organism, cell, these have never been fully known – the more one looks the less one understands even that which one knows. There is no stopping stage where substantiality could be bestowed. The hope of realizing a world of substances in which objectivity is expected to reside and issue from is further dashed in this. Two, the concept of change is that which most people would be willing to accept. But grant that things change. Consider this in connection with the concept of objectivity in which there is always the supposition that there is a core of things which cannot change. Since change is a continuum, to identify a core that is changeless, away from human mind but realizable is contradictory.

This is further buttressed by the fact that if such objective reality in which objectivity is realized is material then it must occupy space and be in time then infinite divisibility is its lot and of such no substantive core could be realized. This infinite divisibility which is the lot of matter makes one yield to the idea that such core must be beyond materiality, space and time since “the notion of matter as a candidate for the status of reality is accordingly dismissed as irrational” (Joad: 1960:108). If such objective reality is not material then it has already been stressed that it is independent of the human mind. This, one could argue, refers to the world of forms which Plato spoke of. But, where exactly is it if it is independent of matter and mind. In all, the objectivity concept in the form of the existence of an objective order of reality existing *in se*, independent of the human mind but knowable loses out or must have to pitch its tent and confound all doubts.

Three, the case of one and many is a case against objectivity as a concept. Put simply, the case is that reality is one – a whole, therefore many things enter into its making hence one would not be sure of how to locate reality in which objectivity inheres. Grasp this, to say that such reality is abstracted from things by the

mind is to subject it to the mind but such reality should be independent of the mind whereas to hold that the involvement with its many aspects would lead one to it would make the idea of objectivity meaningless since no complete experiencing of the many has been occasioned as to lead to the one in which objectivity should strictly be.

Four, further pressured case could be made against the concept of objectivity through Locke and Berkeley (Joad: 160:80-110), in their reaction to the problem of knowledge. According to Locke, who in the main summarized the empiricist theory of knowledge, what the mind really grasps in knowledge is never substance, things in themselves, but its own ideas – ideas which the mind (memory) represents on subsequent occasions. Though he subscribed to the existence of reality (substances) away from the knowing mind this the mind can never know. Directly the mind tries to grasp things *in se*, ideas interpose themselves.

George Berkeley was flabbergasted at how the existence of unknowable reality (substances) could be allowed. This in his view is either due to lack of information (ignorance) and/or irrationality. This positing of an external unknowable reality creates myriads of problems, which however disappears if one does away with the idea of any external reality away from ideas.

Locke in denying the ability to know substances or reality by the human mind except ideas of them denied objectivity since objectivity refers to reality away from the mind or at most one can say that objectivity inheres in that which is never known. This is no less the case with Berkeley. Ideas belong to the mind and these alone exist. Then, wherefore objectivity, one may ask which should inhere in an objective reality existing independent of the human mind? Therefore, one cannot even in the spirit of idealism posit the realizability of the objectivity concept in ideas; the reality here referred to may not even be in the world of forms. Hence, since the question is what man can certainly know and not what he can hope for as the world of forms purport, clarity is still being begged of objectivity as to where it inheres. To believe that objectivity is in such and such is uncalled for – knowledge, conviction is ardently required.

Then, let us turn to the argument from the problem of egocentric predicament. By egocentric many meanings might be inferred but it is used here to imply the unavoidably personal nature of one's experiences, percepts of the external world and the existing things around one and also the unavoidable manifestation of one's person in one's engagement with the rest of existence.

This argument of the egocentric predicament refers above all to the idea of objectivity as capacity for rising above personal prejudices and capability of impartiality in judgment. This is because to realize the objective reality in which objectivity inheres one must be impartial in judgment and avoid personal prejudices – egocentrism.

Perceptions really are integral corpus that are direct reflects of objects of our experiences (sensation) – their properties and relations. It is the process and result of bringing something into what is already given (consciousness) and structuring such (new sensation or experience) in line with that which is already there or changing what is already there in line with the new sensation. Hence, Ajah (1993:57) held it against Berkeley that the objective reality is real and knowable but that in knowing (perceiving) it sense experience is the way. This, in his view, does not imply the disappearance of the objectively real; physical for him (which is alluded to in objectivity) hence one cannot pass through a wall even though walls as such could only be perceived. If according to Spirkin (1983:217), “sensation is the reflection of certain properties of objects during their immediate action on a sense organ, the conversion of excitation into a fact of consciousness then such “reflection of certain properties of objects” and excitations converted into facts of consciousness become referred to as percepts. No doubt, there has never been a unanimous view on percepts or perception.

Perception to some is common sense, to other sense data and even to some still ideas, all which have such problems as, one, since perception is only of parts of what is perceived, how can one explain possible differences in perception in the case of common sense view? Two, how does perception conform to the object in the case of sense data view of perception? Three, as in the case of idealist concept of perception, how could one relate ideas to objects?

Surely, it is hard to doubt that bodies make direct contact with real objects in sensation to yield percepts of which “we obtain information about it indirectly via the stimulation of sense organs” (Joad: 1960:96). Thus, it could be claimed that it is fallacious to deny the existence of the real external world out there and at the same time attempt justifying such denials through arguments such as continuity of change in the real familiar world.

But, what is rather held is that perceptions and beliefs are never straight forward apprehension of real objects and facts. And, that even if real objects and facts become known as such, they are mediated by sense-data and propositions (perception and judgment on them). This is so even if they are misrepresented (Aja: 1993:14).

How does the above yield to the egocentric predicament which negates objectivity? By whatever name – common sense, sense data, ideas, phenomena etc – perception is the farthest knowledge could go and almost all that is known is based on perception. What at most is claimed in knowledge is a representation; never real

object as such. According to Spirkin (1983:218) such representations form memory images of objects of sensations as perceived in the past and revived in the present, if necessary. Such representations could also be objects never real but created out of imaginative potency. Thus, through the egocentric predicament the concept of objectivity suffers major setbacks.

One, reality is something other than percepts but, since the mind can only know the external reality in the form of percepts it could be argued that the mind can know only percepts and not objective reality away from the human mind, hence, objectivity is also unknowable. Two, the more serious case against objectivity through the egocentric predicament is in the situation where objectivity implies ability to rise above personal prejudices and capacity of impartiality in judgment because objectivity can never be attained in these senses. Since no two persons perceive same, knowledge based on individual perceptions can never attain objectivity – do what one can every person must have infused some personal elements into his knowledge. Conclusions, judgments and findings, even in the in sense of scientific knowledge, bear eloquent testimony to the persistence of personal prejudices and partiality in judgment.

Persons are akin to Leibnizian monads, which are self-contained entities banished to perpetually personal (windowless) existence, devoid of any links and which only concur where necessary through pre-established harmony only. Thus, it is here being held that since no two people perceive alike and since knowledge is based on such percepts, knowledge is then a personal experience. Therefore to talk of public knowledge as in science is nothing more than public belief or opinion hence knowledge as such has been acceptably defined as justified true belief. Therefore, from justified true belief no objectivity can issue – it is a belief and not reality, and no individual perceptions can attain objectivity as such since it is strictly personal – to christen it objective as such is mockery of logic.

Then let us turn to argument from the skeptic hurdle (skepticism). This definitely is not the only civilization, many have come and gone. But, really striking to man is that doomsday was brought on civilizations not only by disasters out of their control – such could have commanded in pious piety man's reverence of the unseen hand behind events and bemoan man's helplessness as well as, to some extent, his ignorance. Man however is more irked by annihilating catastrophe brought on existence by what were hitherto thought of as sure knowledge but which in later applications as such spelt doom on man hence an indication of how faulty and unfounded such were. Therefore, when man is, as he is today, led along the road of what are normally regarded as sure certain knowledge and laws as propagated in the sham called modern science (scientific knowledge) disaster had always capped it. This has occasioned the situation of skeptic imbeddedness which characterized the dawn of every civilization.

To understand how skepticism constitute a hurdle to the concept of objectivity, let a closer look be taken at the nature of skepticism. Among others, Eboh (1995:17-18) adduced as reasons for skepticism, one, the always present possibility of error, two, presence of irreconcilability of divergent opinions, three, non-availability of standard criteria of certain truth and error distinction. Hence according to Bittle (1950:26), "skepticism maintains that the mind cannot overcome doubt for human reason is not only perverted and diseased but it is in itself fallacious weak and unstable". Or, as Aja (1993:28-9) would have it, the skeptic decries the irrevocable knowledge of the external world, the self etc. the skeptic confines knowledge to sense data and could be solipsist, sensory, rational or methodical. In other words skepticism (Spirkin: 1983:194) accepts that there is a world external to man the knowledge of its content man seeks but suspends judgment on "universal relativity of knowledge." Thus it is to be understood in the sense of Anyanwu and Ruch (1981:79) that skepticism arose from the method of science. However science here should be understood as synonymous with knowledge (scientia – knowledge) in which case methods of knowing always left some loopholes.

Critics have lashed out at skeptics and skepticism. According to Eboh (1995:23), "a wholesale doubt about the possibility of knowledge is a very difficult position to maintain ... an empty position ... a philosophical absurdity". He gave many reasons (1995:21-22) to prepare grounds for this unequivocal statement. Accordingly Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953:242) unleashed the popular paradigm case argument against skepticism thus: "If a concept is to exist at all, there must be some general agreement about its understanding; and that includes the understanding of how it is to be applied". These and many more arguments could be pitted against skepticism but it constantly keeps, as it raises its undaunted head after each bombardment. It is at the source of every yearning for knowledge hence the wisest man should be skeptic. The more one knows the more one becomes aware of how great the unknown is and how little is the known.

Hence, the skeptic romance once more reached its peak in our times in the pyrrhonist tradition during which nihilism was hooded on man and skepticism paraded to scorn human intellect. This necessarily issued in belief, which obviously resulted in morbid religious obsession of the medieval times. Faith dethroned reason and made reason her undistinguished servant. Minds (great minds) ventured that certain things could be known with certainty. Thus, schools of thought in epistemology were born - rationalism and empiricism. Rationalism stressed the ability of man to know something but that such is only through reason in a process that is purely *a priori*. Such knowledge is a *folding out*- a sort of emanation. Empiricism, on the other hand stressed that man

can know certain things for sure but that such knowledge must have as its source not reason but sense experience – a gathering from outside - *in-folding*. That the above never dislodged skepticism but internalized it would be shown by reference to conclusions reached by two unromantic doers of philosophy in the west – Kant and Hume.

Kant set out to reconcile, through his drastic critique, the rationalist and the empiricist in union which only scientific knowledge, so important to Kant, can be possible. Thus, in his view knowledge (scientific) could only be possible in union of reason and experience. But, in indicating that the substance, *noumenon* which yields phenomenon could not be known he eventually re-enthroned skepticism. With reference to the argument here presented that skepticism hinders objectivity, therefore, if noumena; substances or things-in themselves as such could not be known since there is no definite proof for or against their existence, in what is the concept of objectivity to be anchored?

David Hume, no less, dashed the hopes of realizing objectivity by hoisting skepticism high. He was an empiricist who drove his empirical arguments to devastating conclusions. This he did by logically presenting arguments that rendered the idea of substances impossible. Thus substance which by Descartes is “a thing which exists in such a way as to depend on no other thing for its existence” (Cottingham: 1992:77) does not in Hume’s view exist since there is even no entity or substance called mind. The mind is impossible since from conglomeration of separate experiences no form of internalization can yield a unit – there is no necessary connection amongst separate experiences. Cause and effect preconceived as indicative of necessary connection he disallowed since no proof for that existed. Temporary succession is no necessary connection hence no grounds exist for calling one event cause and another effect. Thus, if there is no substance, according to Hume, wherefore objectivity and its virgin saintly steps?

V. CONCLUSION

The study, as a philosophical study in the aspect of epistemology known as objectivity, magnified the concept of objectivity as an epistemological problem. The work got its relevance along the two lines suggested by Fallico (1962:8): one, a radical clearing of all direct vision obstructers and two, the use of such direct vision for discriminative examination of objects thus directly focused.

The moral, therefore, to be drawn from the above is that the concept of objectivity like every other such concept should be applied with caution especially where it is in connection with what has very far reaching effect on the continued survival of man. Therefore, since the nature of the concept of objectivity is yet to be sufficiently understood hence the truth is that one cannot, once and for all times, determine its nature, hence, the humble submission is that it should be treated with utmost reservation and caution should be observed in its application. The costs of its blatant application, especially in today’s science and technology are too enormous for man to neglect.

Evidently, the realm of philosophy is not restricted, all subjects and aspects of human endeavor come under its fold. Thus, philosophy sometimes propels one beyond that which could be physically and actively involved in but which fundamentally underlies one’s very existence hence, Spirkin’s (1983:19) position that the truly philosophical mind is formed on the basis of a vast experience of life, a mature personality with a broad horizon, a profound and comprehensive knowledge of science and art holds true.

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