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Philosophical handling of "Idiographic Approach"

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Abstract

In general a philosophical approach is classified into Western and Eastern. But then, when it comes to the handling of subjects like Ethics, Morality and to a large extent human-temperament, there is no visible schism in the viewpoints. A philosophical outlook usually deals with queries related to people's varied levels of comprehension and reactions towards a set of situations. In this regard the classic philosophical approach is quite obvious and common with the sensitive minds which permit very little scope to flexibility, in handling perceptions. Philosophical approaches do help us to remove the ambiguities or rather vagueness clearly present in our expressions. At the same time a verbose write-up or prolix lecture, for some time might impress us but would lead nowhere. It is in this context that a philosophical approach, which takes into consideration "behavioural psychological facts", is of utmost importance to gain clarity.

The idealistic proposals that impress us in general in all fields, somehow do not provide a thorough satisfaction in case of "human behaviour". It is an open fact that there are a huge number of complicated factors which relentlessly influence human mind /nature. One of the major ones is "circumstances" having a thorough hold, owing to which the bookish principles in practice miserably fail. In order to overcome psychological disorders, there have been various methods employed. However, Freud's exhaustive case study approach stands valid even today. Therefore, in the modern times we understand the need of getting into details of each case to reach the roots and then apply remedial methods. Despite so many solutions that are proposed, yet tackling the problems with a philosophical outlook, somehow is not encouraged. Human nature had been burdened by many ideologies, mostly in a theoretical manner. Since the results are not arriving as surmised, it is almost declared that functioning of human nature is enigmatic. This paper explores the possibility of philosophical handling of this tricky problem by proposing certain reflective ideas.

Keywords: Idiographic Approach; Idealistic proposals; Psychological Problems; Philosophical remedial measures

1. Introduction

It is always the intellectual tendency which shapes our philosophical approach. At times on perusal we realize that there is a larger scope for a sort of dichotomy. When our curiosity gets developed in a continual manner, it seeks various aspects of any subjective entity entertained. At the end, particularly with the religious philosophies we witness, the uniform spirit but a variety existing in expression. The overall effect of this crystallizes, though unfortunately, into a warring spirit. There are indeed distinct approaches and therefore efforts levelled to gain knowledge. One of the temptations with the religious leaders in their fervent spirit is to go from personal to general, so as to convince, their religion is a reservoir of supernatural powers. Further they, in ecstasy, cross the ethical limits and therefore, take great pride in condemning other religions. The nomothetic outlook is a tendency long ago described by Immanuel Kant. However, Kant spoke of natural sciences and so it was also restricted to an objective phenomena. On the other hand, Kant also clarified the opposite tendency of concentrating on a specific shade and connecting to humanity. That is why

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as a contrast to the former herein there was lot of emphasis on subjective phenomena. No doubt both approaches are necessary particularly in social sciences but then the eagerness to drag personal experience into the zone of physical functioning so as to get it accredited as a general law is detrimental. The two distinctive terms have been used extensively particularly in the nineteenth century by Wilhelm Windelband, usually recognized as neo-Kantian. Nomothetic is usually looked upon as quite scientific approach and obviously very useful in the study of Nature phenomena or in general, natural sciences. No doubt, many a time, it may find extensions by crossing the conventional boundaries. From a purely scientific point of view, it may be considered that the Nomothetic and Idiographic approaches are large scale and small scale studies or Macro and Micro or semi-micro analyses respectively. However, each has its own importance and sizeable contribution to social sciences, or the research studies akin to the subject-discipline.

This takes us to the basic understanding of human nature which has multiple social and personal factors influencing periodically. No doubt some of the societal or cultural factors do leave an imprint upon us, yet not all factors are healthy in its true sense. That is why most of the times we require an admixture of these two approaches to reach the truth. Certain subjects do need a comprehensive effort to draw conclusions by delving into details. Therefore, arriving at some viewpoint or adopting an outlook in a hasty manner would only put us on a wrong track. In a simple manner, everything undergoes changes and it is a process necessary for maturing. This could also be considered as 'Kaizen' method, which involves "continuously changing" for the better when aims are justifyingly fixed.

Most of the times the words Idiographic and Ideographic are used as similar but then there is a marked difference between them. In simple language "Idiographic" is picked up for describing the psychology related to an individual or is like a particular case-study. On the other hand "Ideographic" related to an ideograph or ideogram is a characteristic symbol representing a particular idea or symbolically even a minor theme. It could also be a graphic symbol or sign, avoiding word or a set of words. In this context the term "Philosophical Approach" is frequently used. In fact, not just only a common-man but all look to philosophy whether Eastern or Western to seek, some sort of guidance for solving one's intricate problems, the purpose of live or living meaningfully. Everyone has a number of ideas but fails to organize them in a tidy fashion so as to be easily referred to and use. The analyzing power is the one of utmost utility but sadly missing on many counts. Taking on others viewpoints, perceptions and methods of dealing with routine problems in a sportive manner is the chief benefit of this approach. However, those who are having the result-oriented attitude feel pragmatic approach is the best because the rest may just revel in theoretical or hypothetical treatment. Sometimes it is found that most of us are so much influenced by the doxologies and manipulated tales from the sacred scriptures that literally inertness settles in totality. This slow process of ossification not only rusts the very personality but in course of time damages beyond any repair. Therefore, merely gathering information and expressing before others might bring in scholarly arrogance but having a sportive outlook with philosophical analyzing capacity would produce desirable results.

2. Psychological Analysis

Managing levelheadedness in the face of a tough or challenging situation is undoubtedly an art. Despite the view that most of the time it is the "pragmatic approach" which can easily sort out the problems, yet it does not work every time convincingly. A philosophical approach which trains us to ignore or hold on to the "let go" attitude does work quite satisfactorily. However, it is not as easily said in a casual manner. Firstly, it needs maturity to understand and then the art to handle. One single philosophy may not suffice because in an entropic world the pattern of problems is changing drastically. It is indeed difficult to cope up in every situation with equanimity. In Critique of Pure Reason Kant in the beginning itself says, "Human reason has this peculiar fate that... it is always troubled with questions which it cannot reject, because they spring from the very nature of reason, and which it cannot answer, because they transcend the powers of human reason"¹. Therefore, it would be wise to begin with knowing human nature and its capacity or limitations. Burdening it with a number of ideologies to erect the perfect human personality is an erroneous method. Many times, as Alfred Adler quoted, "It is the feeling of inferiority and insecurity that determines the goal of an individual's existence."² and further he concluded, "One motive is common to all forms of vanity. The vain individual has created a goal that cannot be attained in this life. He wants to be more important and successful than anyone else in the world and this goal is the direct result of his feeling of inadequacy"³. Adler as a president of the psychological society, at Vienna was somehow uncomfortable with Freud's ideas that seemed to be little imposing and totally culminated in repressed sexual feelings. For him it is always the impact of the environment where we live and our natural response, bring out a personality or identity in us. No doubt, shaping of our psyche is more or to a large extent in childhood only. Further this also grows till maturity and both Freud, Adler agreed upon this. The only point of a discord which immensely developed was the starting point and its dependency. Adler did not agree with the basic assumption 'sexuality', whereas Freud never parted from it.

One of the most popular concepts yet in vogue is that most of our personality traits are owing to the hereditary factors. Adler's defence in this regard had been quite different because he believed and announced the 'social circumstances' as the key-factor than thinking that it is handed over from one generation to the other as it is. In this context, we can agree with the hereditary influence on the physical plane and to a very low percentage on the mental attitude. No doubt, many times there had been a sizeable deviation but denying that in total or accepting that itself as the ultimate 'Truth' is not a faultless proposal. In any personality, there are two characteristic attitudes, one which either supports submission without a protest or the other one defending with an open protest. Finally, it all amounts to the intensity of the dominating factor to erect the personality. That is why generalizing personalities just on the basis of a single factor may not give or cover a personality in toto. Adler, of course, placed lot of impetus on the term 'inferiority complex' because that may inspire one to protest to make an impact on the society or meekly submit before the adverse forces. Adler also reasoned out as to why certain people withdraw from the social activities and squarely blame others for their plight. On the other hand those who are energetically ambitious take responsibility of every act performed and subsequently the results coming out thereof. This is just to show how under given similar situation varied responses are possible. No doubt, human beings are always struggling to achieve their aims. The Freudian approach believes in the past, particularly childhood experiences, causing the driving force. Adler's outlook had been always rather based on a philosophical interpretation having a complete trust in the development with a purpose. This may be considered as thoroughly teleological interpretation of natural phenomena having at the base a well-defined purpose for functioning. Therefore, interpretation without the analysis of the response of an individual, might lead to an inference hastily drawn. The famous quote of Adler sounds quite philosophical and absolutely realistic, viz; "The hardest thing for human beings to do is to know themselves and (further) to change themselves." That is why the Socratic-Delphic maxim "Know thyself", covers all the interpretations but philosophically this is a hint for us that our prime duty is to know self with its limitations and then strive for perfection. In this process our innate nature and its capacity are clearly exhibited showing thereby that each person is a special case.

3. Philosophical solution

It is an undeniable fact that humans are easily tempted to quickly make generalization and owing to this specific, case studies are conveniently ignored. In addition, there is always eagerness to categorize. These are done so enthusiastically that everyone is too prone to get accommodated under some recognized banner or the other. As a consequence, this tendency promotes schism and results into hostility towards other groups. The arrogance which one chooses to find a secured shelter, slowly brings upon animosity and in every society polarization takes place. Our universal (as it is proclaimed) ideologies get defeated. The major problem is others' circumstances and problems too. That is why genuine justification is never meted out.

3.1. Kant's Critiques

"Transcendental Idealism" is the short term which clarifies human limitations although with centuries rolling on, reason has become the main source of knowledge. Despite this, knowing what is knowable and what is not or limitations of reason, would really throw light on the "Truth". The distinction between the two is a must because without that we may go miles without the sight of any destination. Natural phenomena are within our grasp and therefore, they can indeed be experienced by all or could be universal recognition but claiming the experience of supersensible objects would be debatable. That is why speaking about the uncommon experiences should be limited to personal/private affair and generalization must be avoided. In this regard Kant cautions us regarding "experience" and "Knowledge" as two terms to be carefully handled. Free Will which is a boon to humanity is unfortunately overlooked and underestimated due to the overenthusiastic surrender to the unseen agencies. It has become a fashion to handover everything to fate, as generally cognized, than serving manhood. Free-will does remain autonomous and so needs no backing. This further recommends that we are responsible for all our volitions, weaknesses, actions and above all the much-entertained mood swings. That is why none other than us should be credited the success or disaster: This would bring us to the conclusion that every response to a given situation is individualistic and much of it depending upon one's own physical and mental limitations. In addition, it would mean very few things can be generalized and so it is a grave mistake to stamp any brand without proper analysis. Usually it is the putative knowledge which being in vogue is used to determine nature of human beings. It is, though not in every case, the sybarite tendency differing in degrees that decides the nature. Although many factors collide with each other before off shoot springs up. Faith developed on a proper reasoning definitely proves to be profitable but the same resulting from an emotional platform does harm. That is why an analysis of the circumstances is more of a sensible approach than taking on everything logically. "Today.. man faces the unprecedented situation that not only certain nations or races are endangered with extinction, but that the survival of the human race in toto is threatened not by some external, natural catastrophes but by mankind itself, by modern man's unreasonable and irresponsible performances. This negatively exemplary situation must be the basic awareness for a new environmental

ethics which is not so presumptuous to aim at the realization of the highest good, but it content with preventing the highest evil, for;

“One can live without the highest good, but not with the highest evil”⁴

4. Conclusion

One of the blunders generally being committed in the past and present is adhering to the theoretical principles with great reverence. Having regard for the old literature is always appreciable but sticking on to the principles thereof without revising is a grave mistake. Majority things are subject to the physical phenomena and therefore ageing factor cannot be ignored for any entity as such. It is sad to see that scientific temper or the outlook is disallowed in the fields of metaphysics, ethics and morality. We cannot deny the fact that everything around us is vigorously changing and therefore, the influencing factors have different modes than they used to be earlier. Generalization for the sake of knowledge is correct but application needs to be carefully handled. Taking on everything unanimously under one roof is a faulty proposition, remaining idealistic can be one's own private choice but the ‘idealism’ cannot be upheld uniformly. Therefore, from a psychological point of view categorization with substantial proofs and reasons is possible. However, philosophically the same has to be viewed by considering various aspects right from sociological to the overall mental makeup. To put it in a nutshell, let us get reminded of what Freud famously wrote that “There are three great humiliations in human history: Galileo discovering that the Earth was not the center of the Universe; Darwin discovering humans were not the center of creation; and Freud's own, discovery that we were not as in charge of our own minds as we believed”⁵ so we may conclude that there is certainly either no room or little room for the free-will to operate and therefore only a composite form of Idiographic and Ideographic approaches can do true service to humanity.

Compliance with ethical standards

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There is no conflict of interest between the authors.

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