

Grounds, Grounding and Reversing the Errors of Understanding Gender Inequality

Olajiga Isaac Oladeji
Department of Philosophy
University of Ado-Ekiti

Abstract

The paper selects and examines the pivotal issue of gender in religion. It is shown that by coherence what obtains in religion are supposed to be aspects of our lived-experience. A barrier is acknowledged in the part of the inquiry if the charge of gender inequality in religion is seen to be “unexamined” in governance. One main focus in the paper is to examine the “universalist assumption” that forms the basis for the justification of the belief in gender inequality. By reason of anthropocentrism, both male and female are connected as an outcome of their creation by God. This is how the main feature of anthropocentrism can easily be shown. In the paper, it is shown that the word, “man” is a mild holist integer for both male and female with a bias towards the male. It is thus the outcome of maintaining a thesis based on this bias that brings hints of gender inequality to the fore. However, a new balanced approach is suggested that will incorporate more realism and flexibility into the argument. It is presumed that the approach (in this sense, existentialist), will preserve neutrality with respect to sex. We simply speak of gender as conceptual requirement in the analysis of the grounding for understanding the basis for the inequality. The line of argument in the existentialist approach is that there is collective fulfillment when either sex enjoys central importance in governance. Gender thus becomes a clear comparative concept for “existential completeness.” This approach will not portray either of the two sexes as umpire in governance. The “process philosophy” of Whitehead permits some understanding of this argument as the issues surrounding gender might shift to the side of female having dominance in governance. The reasons for the prerogative of women would not be an issue.

Introduction

The gender issue is not a new phenomenon, but the concern it addresses in its own theoretical space has continued to gain currency. As the paper highlights, gender inequality ought not to have occasion much alarm within the feminist intellectual atmosphere. One way of explicating this is to work out a framework that would make us achieve a rethinking and some adjustments in our temper to the question of inequality whenever it arises. This is not to say that feminism has no beneficial effect, it has, at least dissolves the crust of prejudice against women. In the paper, our vacillation between the existentialist framework and the “process metaphysics” of Whitehead arises from the fact that man is the foundation of ontology and man’s mode of existence is not terminable. In addition, they both constitute a way of explicating and relating the issue intelligibly to human experience. In this paper, we outline the main grounds and factors forming the basis for the justification for a debate on gender. It is shown that it is on the basis of these factors that the gender issue receives its focus.

The Christian Model of Gender Inequality

In considering gender inequality, certain positions in Christianity are noteworthy and have some implications for the social ethics of both Christianity and modern democracy. There can be hardly any doubt that the overall position of gender inequality has benefited from the influence of traditional Christianity that it might seem unnecessary to advocate equality between the classical ontological descriptions of gender into male and female. In Christianity, while the virtues of women are acknowledged, it does this without lapsing to a scope of gender classification that would account for a justification of equality with males.

From the point of view of Christianity, the female gender may not be desirable. The disposition towards the female gender from this point of view appears not to be easily separated from the value ordering in political and cultural life. The assessment of this plank from Christianity is crucial for appraising gender inequality in its general scope. By way of developing a theory of how justification is connected with inequality, suspicion is directed against the sagacity and wisdom of women in certain important spheres. Similar prejudice is shown against women¹.

From the Genesis account of their creation (2:18-25) through St. Paul's discriminatory regulations for their dress and behaviour (1Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:34-36; 1Timothy 2:9-15), the Christian model depicts women as inferior to men in essential ways². Not just "different", women are allowed less dignity as human persons³.

Unfortunately, the cultural circumstances which lay behind the conclusion of such a value-ordering are not even now sufficiently allayed to offend the consciences of most Christians, who unreflectingly therefore share in the perpetuation of a serious violation against half the human race⁴.

Grant, for the moment, the more accurate way to put this is that traditional Christianity is a guide towards a construct on gender inequality. It is probably no accident to say that gender inequality is preserved and enunciated as Christian "ethos"⁵.

In this vein, the German scholar, Ernst Troeltsch comes readily to mind. According to him, Christianity aimed at suggesting a cosmic ethos whose scope ranges over differences in gender vis-à-vis ability. The Christian Ethos, according to him "recognizes differences in social position, power and capacity, as a condition which has been established by inscrutable will of God; and then transforms this condition by the inner upbuilding of personality and the development of the initial sense of obligation into an ethical cosmos"⁶.

Troeltsch's point is that the Christian ethos espoused ethical and political views on gender inequality in the name of religion. The ethos has succeeded in showing that there is good reason to believe that being subordinated in status to somebody else on the basis of gender is a function to be fulfilled in perpetuation for the viability of any society. According to Sidney Hook, "for those who accept this ethos it made life supportable or endurable even if their status was that of a slave or serf"⁷.

There are those concerned with the subordinating overtone espoused in gender inequality with the conclusion drawn that gender inequality is an "immutable and irrevocable truth". These people may be termed, the chauvinists, while there are those who are professionally engaged with topics and concerns that characterize gender who may be termed, the feminists.

The interminable dispute that is associated with gender inequality as an erroneous conceptualization of mankind is riddled with certain dangers of "split consciousness" where one may regard oneself in different ways primarily by "split consciousness". By "split consciousness", we hope to suggest that it is self-defeating that "there is no mystery, then, about why women are likely to feel at least some initial discomfort with classic philosophy"⁸. What might be a reasonable conception of gender equality is not arrived at by granting requests from either of the two genders because the gender issue is not an issue in a state of flux. If everytime one tries to figure out the inequality in terms of role performance in governance, one will be forced to choose an answer that it is a particular gender that is better fitted and we would get no where because while our sexes are not in a flux, the lived-experience is.

One of the many problems of gender inequality upon genuine reflection apart from the notion of alienation is that it easily gives rise to dualisms in thought and this much has left its marks on the world stage. The result of course cannot be silence. This is quite natural. The position of women in society had to be theoretically confronted by western thinkers (after all, they were right there as mothers, sisters, wives)⁹. A guide to an understanding of the predicament of dualisms in thought occupies an important place in the works of W.E.B. Du Bois. According to him, "it is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others... one ever feel his twoness..."¹⁰. The foundational ontology imposed by gender inequality forces it upon us at once, two faces of consciousness, that is, to be conscious of ourselves in one peculiar way rather than another.

For our purpose, all that have been said is meant to adduce facts to gain reflections on the grounds and grounding of gender inequality. The purpose here is to delimit the factors forming a basis for the justification of gender inequality from a request of justification. We must distinguish between that which is given from the basic training in a subject which is connected with grounding. The essence of this distinction is not to be tied to one of them because of the temptation to look inward for support if the phenomenon of gender is to be discussed. The results of the grounds for forming a basis for the justification of gender inequality have eluded the horizons and intentions of its progenitors in evaluating its adequacy. It is thus an issue for metareligious considerations. At this juncture, we argue that gender inequality cannot be explained in terms of a singular influence.

To illustrate what is concretely involved in gender debate, one is inclined to say that the grounds, and grounding for its discourse are erroneous. In our opinion, the prospects of a way out are broad in existentialism where there is so much emphasis on the “facts of existence”. Our concern however is not to cut through all the themes of existentialism but to select some influential opinions that are in consonance with the gender issue.

The Common Focus of Existentialism on the Fact of Existence

For certain reasons, we hope to put Martin Heidegger in the center of our discourse on existentialism. This is because; there are some themes in his philosophy that highlight the essence of his thought upon the subject. Heidegger’s thought is on the whole a reaction to the traditional way of conceptualizing man which provokes his reflections. He acknowledges the fact that man is an inheritor of experience of preceding generations and traditions, but this is a wrong starting point for him.

In his major work, *Being and Time*, *Dasein* is presented as an important area of his thought. There is a temptation to assume that by *Dasein*, Heidegger meant to designate man, but he uses it as an entity with regards to its being that is, “a being-there”. As it were, man is a matter of insight and the closest we get to say that being belongs to being. *Dasein* has the signification of involvement in the world. Indeed, there is no limit to its possibilities. Heidegger’s refusal to equate *Dasein* with man is an acknowledgement of a permanent contradiction inherent in it as a representation or concept for a being that is involved in the world. According to him,

The more we leave this world, not relating it directly to a “subject” and the like, the less burdened the term remains and the more opportunity we then have to fix it more rigorously... the answer to the question of the who of this entity which we ourselves in each instance are is .Dasein

Heidegger’s point here is that we should think of concepts as changing abstract entities because *Dasein* finds itself in relation to time. The import to be gained here is that “*Dasein* is futural in an original sense.”¹²

In a certain sense, the philosopher speculates on the basis of the future, and he is equally mistaken when he regards his treasures as actual cash, or when he treats them without understanding their real value.¹³ This problem is addressed to a degree by Alfred North Whitehead, to which we now turn. For Whitehead, what is accessible for reflection in human experience is the “process of change” as there is nothing like an unchanging experience. From here, it is easy to see how the general conception of gender inequality should go. The ontological descriptions of gender into “maleness” and “femaleness” should be taken as a mere comparative concept and the difficulty it presents when it borders on inequality should not be seen to be static.

There is always an influence from the past (our experience never starts from “absolute zero”); there is always some specific character in the present (the present is experienced in some way or another, it has a discernible “subjective form”); there is always some possibility in the present for introducing novelty (we are not doomed to replay the past over and over and over again exactly as we received it); and there is always within the process a reference forward to the future (we find the lure ahead of some kind of satisfaction that constitutes a “subjective aim” for the present organisation of experience).¹⁴ What perhaps above all makes justification for gender inequality plausible consists in the grounds in which it is given in a context in which it has never been experienced. Heidegger asserts that “*Dasein* comprises in itself facticity (thrownness), existence (projection) and falling, *Dasein* is something that has been thrown, it has been brought into its ‘there’ but not of its own accord.”¹⁵ The horizon of *Dasein* should be understood to mean that *Dasein* did not negotiate its past, that notwithstanding, *Dasein* possess its past and expecting its future possibilities.

The full effect of “the past” easily makes the thesis of facticity to stand. Man is in default of his facticity. It is not by his design and making that he finds himself thrown into the world. The important ending to this fact is that facticity is the possibility of *Dasein*’s limitation. Facticity makes the disclosure about the default mode of *Dasein* because its projection into the future is already delimited by some “givens.” Man’s facts of birth such as specific sex, pigmentation of the skin, race, intelligent quotient etc, are instantiations of the factual givens. All of these “facts” are inalienable and there is no available option for man than to embrace them as “givens” even when he inclines not to do so. Thus, gender disparity is an inescapable relationship with the world because nobody negotiates his/her gender. It remains largely a factual given.

With greater clarity, for Heidegger, a useful evaluative category for the future is existentiality. What this points towards is that while facticity is rarely a task for man, existentiality points to the task lurking in the “yet to be.” The “very being of man consists of aiming at what it is not yet.”¹⁶

The support we receive because of our facticity whenever gender differential is instantiated is to consider “*Dasein* as being-with-the being of others as co-*Dasein*.”¹⁷ We might add that the relevant connections with our facticity on gender disparity need not be deterministic but thought to be compatible with what is called: existential completeness. There is a benefit of thematic empathy shared by either gender where they are reconciled as co-beings.

For some thoughts on this issue, one of the errors in understanding gender inequality is to assume that there are advantages to be derived from domination by a particular gender. It is quite easy to understand that with the notion of existential completeness, our attention would shift from conflict of interests because it does not give scope for domination. If our existence is to have meaning since we did not negotiate for our ‘givens,’ it will be difficult within the cognizance of existential completeness to enunciate the bearings of ability in the light of gender.

Overall, the notion of existential completeness dissolves the crust on the Christian Ethos, myth, and traditional dogma that a particular gender is superior to the other.

Conclusion

This paper as presented centred on the issue of gender inequality. It has brought into focus the grounds, grounding and the errors of understanding gender inequality. One proposed way of providing an understanding to the debate is to spare some thoughts on the existentialist’s and Whiteheadian accounts of “givenness.” Indeed, one may be concerned to study the significance of gender disparity through evaluations made by either the chauvinist or the feminist, but we have put forward a theoretical framework that will be helpful in reversing the errors of understanding gender inequality. Mostly, our gender is thought of as a myth made plausible and discoverable by our negotiations, but a focus on what this paper has highlighted will certainly reverse such error. In claiming this much, our gender disparity begins to delight us and ceases to be a hotbed of quarrels. The following will further inspire our understating of gender disparity. Nothingness might save or destroy those who face it, but those who ignore it are condemned to unreality. They cannot pretend to a real life, which, if it is full of real risks, is also full of real promises.¹⁸

References

1. Cf. Frederick Ferre, *Basic Modern Philosophy of Religion*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1966). p. 410
2. Ibid
3. Ibid
4. Ibid. p. 411
5. Cf. Sidney Hook, “Philosophy and Human Conduct” in Charles A. Morre (ed.) *Philosophy and Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1962). p.24
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Charles W. Mills, *Blackness Visible* (USA: Cornwell University Press, 1998).p. 2
9. Ibid. p.3
10. Cf. Charles W. Mills, *ibid*.p.10
11. Martin Heidegger, *History of the Concept of Time* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1985).p.237
12. Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1988). P. 265
13. S. N. Trubetskoi, ‘On the Nature of Human Consciousness’ in *Readings in Russian Philosophical Thought*, Louis J. Shein (ed). (Mouton: The Hague Press, 1968). p.265
14. Frederick Ferre, *Op.cit*.431
15. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967). P. 1
16. M. Grene, *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Paul Edwards (ed.) (New York: Harvard University Press, 1958). P. 460
17. Martin Heidegger, *Op.cit* p.237
18. Demetrios Capetanakis in *Existentialism a theory of man* Ralph Harper (Harvard University Press, Massachusetts, 1958).P.94