

ONTOLOGICAL BASIS OF LIBERATION AND CRITICAL THINKING AS A SOLUTION TO DRUG ABUSE AMONG KENYAN SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

Elvis Omondi Kauka

School of Education, Department of Educational Foundation, University of Nairobi

Abstract: This study sought to philosophically explore the concept of liberation from faulty thinking to critical thinking as an ontological vocation of all human beings as a solution to drug abuse among Kenyan secondary school students. The study uses the analytical method alongside the Cartesian methodic doubt in examining the student as an inherent critical thinker, the inefficiencies of current solutions to menace of drug abuse and in proposing a better way out of drug abuse. The study found out that the solution to drug abuse is not to be found outside the drug abuser but in provocation of the actual and the potential abuser's mind to think critically. The first cause of drug abuse has been observed in this study to be the perversion of curiosity and therefore the solution to the problem should be based on addressing 'incorrect thinking' through pedagogies that seriously promote critical thinking. The students who undergo serious training in critical thinking are in themselves a solution to drug abuse. This study offers a recommendation necessary for the prevention of drug abuse among Kenyan secondary school students: that is the content and method in educating teenagers in secondary schools should in themselves be oriented towards making learners critical thinkers.

Keywords: Liberation, Faulty Thinking, Critical Thinking, Ontological Vocation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Researches across the world indicate that drug abuse among teenagers is indeed a challenge. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) Report (2005) indicates that 5 percent of world's population between ages 15 and 64 had used some drug at least once in the preceding 12 months. The World Drug Report (2005) compiled from 95 countries across the globe observes that seizures of drugs increased four-times in 2003. Ten years later the reversal of this trend has not been achieved and drug abuse has become more and more rampant. Drug abuse amongst secondary school students in Kenya is on the increase. The National Agency for Campaign against Drug Abuse (NACADA) (2006) reports that "...most secondary school students today are experimenting with drugs". It is also observed that, "...drug peddlers and barons were known to target the youth as a lucrative market for their unethical business....one of the root causes of some indiscipline cases in institutions could be traced to drug and substance abuse (Ngesu et al., 2008, p.304). Paul & Elder whose definition of critical thinking was presented earlier stress on the power of analysis and evaluation in critical thinking. Wade and Tavris stress on the will power, that is, the willingness to think critically. Thinking critically is a commitment. This means that a critical thinker is not just one who has the capacity to analyze and assess, it also means that he or she is willing to use the said capacity. As such critical thinking becomes a tool. It is no wonder Namwamba (2007, p. 47) describes it as "...a tool, skill and process through which judgment of ultimate reality is arrived at." A critical thinker can also be said to be an individual who has successfully undergone the process of learning that lays emphasis on cognitive powers, the kind of teaching that this research calls critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy and

critical thinking are related causally; critical pedagogy leads to critical thinking, and critical thinking is a proof that a person has gone through critical pedagogy. A critical pedagogue exposes the learner to a context that requires critical thinking (analytical and evaluative). The learner uses tools of critical thinking to decipher the content and context of pedagogy, and at the end of the process we can infer that they have been trained in critical thinking.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem is that there is a drawback in the manner in which the drug abuse menace has been tackled so far. Most of the measures put forward are more reactive than proactive; and the few which are proactive like peer education seem to address drug abuse per se while leaving out the prima causa of drug abuse-which can only be found in the ontological and existential realms of the student. As such, it is the view of this study that the drug problem is a pedagogical problem with its root in the reasoning faculty. Therefore to solve the issue of drug abuse without proper instruction of the mind in matters of critical thinking is probably to engage in futility. It is because of the aforementioned that the current study was carried out.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of liberation is described by Collins Thesaurus of the English Language as “freeing, release, freedom” (p.240). It further defines its root noun, liberty as “...autonomy...self determination”. Ontological vocation refers to the ultimate responsibility attributable to a human being as a being that is rational and that has a soul. This state of affairs is based on the fact that a human being is a transcendental being. By transcendental we imply two things: first, that a human being’s existence is founded in the spiritual realm though manifested in the empirical realm. Plato calls it “existence in the world of forms” (Matti, 1994, p. 75).

Secondly a human being has transcendental properties as indicated in Aristotelian conception of metaphysics. These are unity, truth and goodness (Matti, 1994, p.137). Unity as a transcendental property indicates that a human being is one with ‘him/herself’ and is determined in ‘him/herself’, Truth because a human being truly exists and as such cannot be said not to exist (a phenomenon that drug addiction attempts to assert) and Good because each human being has sufficient reason for their existence. Liberation as an ontological vocation therefore explains the fact that humans are confronted by enslaving circumstances which are totally foreign to ‘humanness’ and as such contradict their inherent free nature. Human being as a liberal being then implies that humans are basically autonomous, self determining beings. Different constitutions of democratic societies recognize this fact. At a wider level, the universal declaration of human rights recognizes humans as self determining beings. The first article of the universal declaration of human rights asserts that “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood” (United Nations, 1945). The same document posits in its third article that “Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.”

Analyzed critically the first article actually answers three philosophical questions: the logical question of “Why?” the ontological question “what?” and the ethical question of “what ought humans do? In regards to what a human being is, the answer is to be found in the definition in the first statement of the declaration paraphrased thus ...free being with dignity and rights. The “why?” question looks for the ontological justification of why human beings are what they are namely, free with dignity and rights. The answer is based on causality: That human being is free because they are endowed with reason and conscience. Finally what is the ethical implication? They have the responsibility “to act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

The ‘why’ question interests this study the most at least at this stage because being an ontological question it explains why human beings are free. Appeal to reason and conscience comes in handy in an attempt to locate the human freedom. A good instance is the view that “Self determination involves the notion of thinking in the sense of reflecting, calculating, memorizing, predicting, judging and deciding” (Barrow, 1988, p. 98). At the primordial stage of a human being’s thought is freedom and possibility of judging and deciding by themselves. However, along the way, one’s decisions are met by the tyranny of the other free humans. As such it is advisable that “the only way to realize the ideal of self determining adults is to grant children self determination from the beginning” (Barrow, 1988, p. 101). The view of granting children self determination is however questionable because it could mean that they are not free at birth. In fact, Barrow argues that children merely respond to stimuli, yes but they respond because they have the seed of reason in them. In rational psychology we ask at what stage or under what situation is a human being rational. The potency to act is inherent in every human child.

According to existential philosophy, the idea of freedom and consciousness becomes a human reality. Existentialists hold the view that “human beings are condemned to be Free” (Sartre as cited in Ozmon & Craver, 1995, p. 250). Jean-Paul Sartre philosophized over human consciousness which led to the birth of his first treatise *L'Être et le Néant* (Ozmon & Craver, 1995, p.249). This treatise examines consciousness (*Le Poursoi*) and the objects of consciousness (*L'ensoi*). *Le Poursoi* is the reflection and negation of the objective world. Ozmon & Craver (1995) observe that this implies that human consciousness is its object, its own teacher, a human being is individual and as an individual they should make decisions based on their categories without unnecessary external duress.

Ontology being the study of “...structure, and principles of whatever... inasmuch as it is or (it) exists” (Mattei, 1994, p. 137) views human being as part of whatever that exists that is, being. Human being however is not just any type of being but a substantial being for the fact that they are not mere accidents. The substantial nature of the human being is pegged on the fact that he has an Essence or that which makes a human being to be what they are. In ontology, Essence refers to the “...mode or manner according to which reality might be fashioned” (Mattei, 1994, p.138). It is “...a principle of the actual existing thing...the element that provides full explanation of “what” the existent being really is” (Mattei, 1994, p. 138). Saint Thomas refers to this whatness as quiddity. We therefore ask the question, what is human being's essence? Where is their quiddity? Mattei (1994) points out that “... the uniqueness of humankind (lies) in the power of their logos that is their mental capacity for asking important questions, attempting satisfactory answers and discovering “meaning” even behind the most frightening natural phenomena” (Mattei, 1994, p.54).

It is thus logical to infer that logos is the principle that humanizes a being. It is in this regard that Socrates postulated that “...human being is their soul” (Socrates as cited in Mattei, 1994, p.54). But what is soul? Soul is the faculty of intelligence, it is what makes human beings acquire knowledge. It is the seat of wisdom, logos or sapientia. The soul's nature is freedom. It is in fact arguable that whatever has a soul is free because soul is freedom and freedom is soul. The unique fact however is that a human being is not born “actually” free. (The term ‘actually’ in this context has an ontological connotation of ‘full realization’. Nonetheless, humans have the seed of freedom which means they have the potency of actualizing their freedom.

4. FINDINGS

Having noted that freedom is an inherent human attribute, we posit here that a full human being is one who is free and that a free human being is a happy human one. Every human being, in all they do, and in all they are, they pursue happiness. This means that if there is a being referred to as a full human being then we can deduce that there are humans that are not full. This is a hard fact. This is because all human beings are only born potentially free but not actually free. As long as humans are beings, they possess potency and act as part of principles of being. Potency in this case is the seed of freedom inherent in all human beings. This seed needs deliberate effort of nurturing for it to fully actualize. An actualized human being is not only free but also very happy.

Humans are prisoners of ignorance at birth. The most unfortunate thing is that they do not know that they are prisoners because ignorance presents itself to the humans as pseudoknowledge (Mattei, 1994, p.54). It is therefore unavoidable for humans to actualize their potential for freedom based by sharpening their rational faculties. Mattei (1994) makes a very important point: “... only by means of a serious and committed examination of one's life, one can achieve true liberty and thus become truly human.” This implies that a true human being is one who has actualized his freedom through the rigour of perfecting the soul.

On the other hand, a human being is a slave who still lives in ignorance. This point is asserted by Paulo Freire when he says that the ontological vocation of man is to seek for freedom (Freire, 1970, p.55). Rene Descartes' dictum of *cogito ergo sum* applies very well. In this case *cogito ergo sum* (translated ‘I think therefore I am’) simply means that a full human being is one who is not only conscious but also able to deliberately doubt among many other things their existence.

Anti-liberation refers to actions that work against the autonomy of an individual. In this case drug abuse and addiction are enslaving agents. They are an obstacle to the actualization of freedom that is proper to humans. In metaphysics we study the first principles as those principles that govern the existence of being at the very basic level. These principles are explored below. The first principle is the Principle of Non-Contradiction (PNC) which states that “a thing cannot at the same time be and not be” (Mattei, 1994, p.137). In so far as addiction is concerned we infer that a human being cannot at the same time be free and not free; that is to say that it is a contradiction for anyone to think that a student who abuses and

is addicted to drugs is a free entity, however much such students would want to claim that they are free to do whatever they want with their lives.

The second principle is the Principle of Identity (PID) which states that “every being is determined in itself, is one with itself and is consistent in itself (Mattei, 1994, p. 137). Any human student is self determined. This being the case their manner of living should be consistent with the ideal of self determination. Therefore a human student is an existential being, a project that fashions itself the best way it can. Drug abuse as a dependency therefore acts as an oppressive foreign entity that blockades the project of self determination.

Thirdly the principle of the Excluded middle (PEM) states “there cannot be an intermediate between contradictions” (Mattei, 1994, p. 137). This principle would imply that a drug addict is either totally a slave or totally free. Given that addiction leads to continuous desire for the drugs, it turns out that it is not possible for an addict to be free.

Fourth, the principle of sufficient reason (PSR) “everything that exists has sufficient reason for its existence” (Mattei, 1994, p. 137). The sufficient reason for drug use is to promote the well being of humanity. Therefore abusing drugs means operating outside the realm of sufficient reason of drugs and this explains why any other reason for drug use is illogical and teleologically erroneous.

In a nutshell, a student who decides to abuse drugs for whatever reason other than sufficient reason (namely promoting well being of humanity) is actually living an ontologically contradictory life, that is, a life of slavery, a life that is determined is not worth living. Such kind of life is meaningless and needs re-examination. One of the curious causes of drug abuse is peer pressure. The social psychologists call it conformity. Conformity is surrendering to real or imagined social pressure (Weiten, 2013, p. 515). It is manifested when people do things to please others and not because they are genuinely convinced of the merits of their actions/decisions. This behaviour seems to be common among human beings especially when they are in the midst of a large group. Actually the larger the group size the higher the possibility of unanimity even when the majority could be wrong.

People conform because of normative influence (fearing negative social influences) and informational influence (search of guidance from others on how to react/ behave in ambiguous situations) (Hogg and Cialdini & Sherif as cited in Weiten, 2013, pp. 516-517). When a student has a set of friends who smoke, and he/she is the only one that does not smoke, the possibility of smoking to avoid being odd is high. But even if he/she had very few friends and is dying with curiosity they may still desire to get information from the same friends on how cigarette tastes. This is a problem. Solomon Asch notes “...we have found the tendency to conformity in our society so strong that reasonably intelligent and well-meaning young people are willing to call white black is a matter of concern” (as cited in Weiten, 2013, p. 515). Conformity means that the student sacrifices his/her freedom to think for oneself and as such becomes a slave of his/her peers. This is a direct insult on the nature of human beings, whose ontological vocation is to strive towards actualizing his/her freedom.

Blind obedience is even worse because it involves authority (Weiten, 2013, p. 38). It is following direct command from a person in authority and as such when teachers stress too much on obedience they kill the capacity to meaningfully dissent, which implies suffocating the freedom to think dialectically. When such students find themselves in a situation of drug abuse they may unlikely dissent. A person is said to be addicted or depended on drugs when they are forced to continue to use drugs and psychotropic substances to avoid withdrawal effects such as fatigue, apathy, irritability, depression, and disorientation (Mwamwenda, 1996, p. 487). From the psychological point of view addiction reinforces perceived positive effects like desire for drugs. People who are addicted to drugs are physical and psychological slaves of the drugs. The slavery perpetuates itself through repeated abuse. It is said that the left hemisphere of the brain overpowers the seat of wisdom (left brain) to the extent that proper thinking and reasoning is interfered with, which by default means poor thinking and poor thinking leads to slavery (Weiten, 2013, p. 39).

Praxis refers to the convergence between reflection and action. It is the wholism where reflection and action work conjunctively (Freire, 1970, p. 68). Action and reflection are substantially linked such that without reflection praxis is reduced to activism and without action praxis becomes mere verbalism (Freire P., 1970, p. 69).

The praxis of liberation simply put is the careful, reflective and active process of unshackling the chains of oppression; be it socio-cultural oppression, political oppression, intrapersonal oppression, drug abuse, oppression from dogmatization in education among others. How then should the praxis of liberation proceed? We posit that liberation has to painfully start within the individual. Yet the individual human beings are what they are because they are rational beings. As such true

liberation begins with the transformation of the rational power of humans. In other words a human's thinking and attitude must be developed to their highest potential through the process of critical thinking.

Universally speaking, thinking is natural to human beings, but good thinking can only be nurtured (based on learning and education). Good thinking is what makes a human being. Humans have been referred to as Homo sapiens (Latin for 'the wise person'). The sapiential nature of humans as made Aristotle describes them as rational animals (Aristotle as cited in Mattei, 1994, p. 23). For Rene Descartes, he existed in so far as he thought (cogito ergo sum, je pense donc je suis) (Descartes, 1641, p.9).

A thinking that is good and that is truly human is critical and therefore praxiological. Critical thinking is based on critical pedagogy (the condition of educating people to think seriously. It is observed that "...the conditions under which human beings live upon the earth are the result of their state of consciousness" (Sharma, 2009, p. 247) which commutatively means that the conditions of education in a particular country or continent depend on what the citizens are aware of as good education that leads to good thinking (critical thinking). Europe, for instance, is known for a long history of rigorous study based on methodologies of the antiquity like dialectics and rhetorics. Some of the academic giants include ancient Greece and modern Germany and France.

However as observed by Sharma they fall short of many perfections needed for critical education. She observes,

There can be no doubt that the current educational system of Europe is a great advance on many methods of antiquity, but...it is based on an insufficient knowledge of human psychology, and it is only safeguarded in Europe from disastrous results by the refusal of ordinary student to subject himself to the processes it involves, his habit of studying only so much as to avoid punishment or to pass an immediate test (Sharma, 2009, p.250)

Sharma's concern can be applied to the Kenyan situation because some Kenyan students perceive education to be cramming the night before a test, instead of inquisitively examining a concept and attempting to synthesize it into their own lives. Cramming and critical thinking are vastly different skills (Hove, 2011, p.12).

In a class that consists mainly of lectures with periodic quizzes and examinations, students can often get a passing grade by cramming 'the night before quizzes and tests (Paul & Elder, 2008b, p. 35). In as much as such students may pass exams, they may not automatically be considered as critical thinkers. One needs only to look at some of the reasons why Kenyan high school students abuse drugs to confirm the deficiency in critical thinking.

A study done by Ngyema Kimweli in 2014 indicated that peer pressure represented the highest reason why boys and girls engaged in drug and substance abuse, followed by curiosity and self esteem (Ngyema, 2014, p.42). Peer pressure or what we refer to as succumbing to the mob psychology and poor decision making based on curiosity are clear indicators of erroneous thinking or simply put lack of critical thinking. This state of affairs justifies why critical thinking is crucial to Kenyan education system, if the problem of drug abuse is to be won.

Since the time of Socrates, criticality has been a philosophical adventure. We have already mentioned Socrates as a model of critical thinking. However for several years now critical thinking has been mentioned among psychologists and Educators. Education is the most important tool that can properly shape the mind of a citizen into critical thought. This means that the act of educating in itself should be critical.

To be critical, an education system should embrace critical pedagogy which is a method that teaches the learner more on how to question answers rather than on how to answer questions; for it is in questioning answers that questions are answered satisfactorily. For the sake of comparison, this research briefly examines critical thinking from the perspective of psychology. Psychology deals with critical thinking from a more empirical level. This will help form a more extensive stance for explicating critical thinking. Psychologists are of the view that critical thinking is a necessary part of human cognitive development. The theory of disuse has it that if a part of human faculty is not used it dies off. By commutation, if the cognitive faculty is not exercised, it finally becomes vestigial and in so doing the human thinker becomes a wasted entity and thus unable to shape his life (Wade & Tavis, 2005, p.257).

Moreover most people know that you have to exercise the body to keep it in shape, but they may not realize that clear thinking also requires effort and practice. All around us we can see examples of flabby thinking. Sometimes people justify their mental laziness. A number of psychologists believe that contemporary education shortchanges students by not encouraging them to think critically and creatively. Often teachers and students view the mind as a bin for storing "the

right answers” or a “sponge for storing knowledge”. Many students have learned to memorize the “right” answers but without the ability to think critically, “they are unable to formulate rational arguments or see through misleading advertisements that play on their emotions” (Wade and Tavis, 2005, p. 7). This observation is crucial in that it points out the fact that education as the practice of critical thinking must be perennial in shaping a healthy mind. Secondly it extends the scope of education as one in which memorization and mechanization of the mind become minimal. In as much as the study by Wade and Tavis observe the situation in the United States of America the same observations are replicable in the Kenyan context.

The evaluation in high school education in Kenya is done by what students do in three weeks (KCSE exams) compared to four years of studies. This state of affairs provides a precedent for simple cramming of answers if a student is to survive what Kenyan society views as successful education. It is also important to note that cognitive Psychology frowns upon emotional “reasoning”. In so doing cognitive psychology builds a premise on the role of critical thinking in emotional education. No doubt that emotions are very important in making someone grounded on any issue. It invokes the fire of action and this includes action in thinking. However for any thought to be clear, one must mitigate emotions. Wade and Tavis (2005) observe that “..when gut feelings replace clear thinking the results may be dangerous” (p.9). They note that the effects of “gut thinking” is responsible for actions such as persecutions, wars, mob lynching, and I add, drug abuse amongst students, irresponsible sexual behaviour blind adherence to destructive groups among others. In fact it is argued that controlling emotional reasoning is one of the guidelines of critical thinking (Wade & Tavis, 2005, p.9). Do educationists regard critical thinking as a necessary element of education? Before answering this question, we first comment on what education really is, its aims and practice, for in these is to be found the basis for critical thought. Education comes from the Latin noun *Educatio*. *Educatio* is a derivative from the verbs *Educare* and *Educere*. According to Njoroge and Benaars (1986), “...the verb *Educare* was used to refer to the general process of growing up, of rearing, of bringing up...” (p.129). *Educere* is the Latin verb for ‘to lead out’. These two verbs imply that education is bringing up the young ones through leading them out. *Educatio*, is therefore the leading out of the young ones, but then from where? where to?

Sharma (2009, p.121) answers this question: “In training a child to activity of thought, above all things we must beware of what I call “inert ideas”-that is to say, ideas that are merely received into the mind without being utilised, or tested, or thrown into fresh combinations”. Sharma gives us the idea (by implication) that the child needs to move gradually from intellectual inertia to vitality ; in other words, from less activity (higher passivity) to more activity. She further recommends “From the very beginning of his education, the child should experience the joy of discovery”.

Discovery always calls for meeting the cognisable (the knowable) before it reaches you and this requires activity of the mind. The mind must stretch and flex itself. We therefore infer that, for Sharma, critical thinking would be justifiable in an education set up in the process of making a person; given that a person is an active being. It turns a boy into a man and a girl into a woman, and not into a container or a robot. Sharma (2009) makes an important point that can be explained through metaphysics. A Human being is said to have been made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1). Ontologically speaking, this means that the human being is the most reliable reflection of God. God on His part is *Actus purus*, He is pure act. Thomistic tradition explains God as one who is forever active. He cannot stop acting. He is the mover of all that moves, the creator of all creatures. Logically speaking then, human being is human being when they are more active and imitative of their source; which is the *actus purus*. In education then when a learner is exposed to an education that is inert, an education that reduces them to a container their humanity and divinity is destroyed. Yet this is an absurdity.

Negative Education: Jean Jacques Rousseau in his ‘Emile’ advises “Let the child learn nothing because you have told him...but because he has learnt it for himself...if ever you substitute authority for reason, he will soon cease to reason” (as cited in Barker, 1986, pp 48-51). Rousseau makes a point of teaching without ‘teaching’ in which the learner is also his own teacher. Lessening the authority and the magnanimity of the teacher provides an environment for self education. This is called Negative Education. Negative education is an appeal to logical negativity and not moral negative. It is negative because the popular and traditional authority of the teacher is reduced to enhance the critical power of the learner. The purpose of negative education is to promote the heuristic nature of critical thinking. It obeys the existentiality and individuality of a learner. In a research carried out in Benin and published in the International Review of Education (2014), Zghibi Makram and his companions found out that the presence of the teacher significantly reduces the learner’s freedom and creativity, especially in the context whereby the teacher is seen as an institutional authority.

Teacher’s presence therefore is undesirable and a constraint to the expression of synoetics and critical thinking among learners unless the teacher properly mitigates his authority and becomes a learning teacher. The article reports that as a

result of the presence of the teacher an attitude of hesitation among the students was observed while his absence showed that the students felt free to play their roles.

The absence of institutional control gradually made the students more responsible (Zghibi ,Sahli ,Jabri ,Ouelhezi ,Guelmami ,Wallian , 2014, p. 757). This finding explicitly confirms Jean Jacques Rousseau's postulation that education should be carried out through naturalization and criticality.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study has attempted to elucidate the concept of liberation from the point de vu of ontology by appealing to critical thinking. It points out that any being that is human and that has consciousness has the inbuilt capacity to think critically. It is in thinking critically that the human being exercises freedom, liberate themselves from intrinsic and extrinsic slavery and as such justifies the metaphysical location of liberation/freedom. A student who decides to enter into drug abuse then is one who probably has a stagnated liberatory development . From this argument, we attempt to locate the problem of drug abuse in the self, not others, not peers, not drug barons. Though the study has mentioned critical thinking, it has not delved deep enough into it. The idea of critical thinking in this study was to act as a premise for the concept of liberation. The study critically analyses critical thinking and the means by which students can arrive at it. According to this study the means by which students can arrive at critical thinking is referred to as critical pedagogy. The ideas in this study can better be summarized into the following logical argument: Premise 1: Whatever is able to think critically is able to liberate itself Premise 2: That which has potency of criticality necessarily actuates its criticality Premise 3: All Humans have potency to think critically Premise 4: If all humans have the potency to think critically then they are able to actuate their critical thinking skills. Premise 5: If all humans have the potency to think critically and are able to actuate their critical thinking skills then all human beings are free. Premise 6: If all human beings are free then liberation is universal and if liberation is universal then liberation is ontological. Premise 7: Liberation is universal because it is inherent. Therefore liberation is an ontological Phenomenon.

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