

PHILOSOPHER IN THE MARKET SQUARE: PROBING THE STATEMENT ‘I WAS MISLED’

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Abstract: Traditionally, such a statement as ‘I was misled’ is intended to be taken seriously by the addressee and considered an expression of the true state of affairs. Unfortunately, the statement has many logical implications that often go unnoticed by both the one who utters it and the addressee. The paper critically explores the instrumentality of logical and epistemological analyses in its attempt to lay bare the implications of the statement being true and of entertaining the underlying belief in the first place that ‘I was misled’. By so doing, the paper attempts to show that even if the function of philosophy is merely to analyse language, it would still have contributed indispensably and significantly to human society by clarifying ambiguous concepts. It also attempts to demonstrate the relevance of critical thinking in human society.

Key words: causation; justification; market square; philosophy.

Introduction

The inspiration for this article comes partly from Genesis (3: 11-13) regarding the reasons given by Adam and Eve for eating from the forbidden fruit, and partly from Gene Van Note’s *Holiness in the market place*. Note argues that holiness is not for some isolated special individuals, but for everyone including those in the public arenas (guided by the business principles of profit maximisation at the expense of others) who care to attain it. In the same vein, to speak of a philosopher in the market square appears conceptually incoherent at a first glance. In the market place, personal profit replaces reason in the first place. In such a scene, the thinking of a philosopher would hardly ever be appealing to or appreciated by pecuniary minded marketers.

It must be noted, however, that the market square, as employed in the paper symbolises human society in general, which according to some scholars is ruled by emotion or anything other than reason as represented in the theoretical conflict between Plato and Aristotle (Ober, 2012, p. 9). Similarly, in African theology as represented in the traditional ‘soteriology’ of the Yoruba, the market represents the world and the hub of commercial emotions.¹ The

¹ It is a common feature of Yoruba (African) poetry to conceive of and represent the world as market.

engagement of the philosopher represents a conscious attempt to apply reason and order in a place or environment that had hitherto been disorderly and in which ignorance had earlier reigned supreme regardless of the conflicting conceptions of philosophy even among experts.² With the concepts and conceptions in mind, this article aims to analyse one of the common statements often taken for granted in daily human affairs and relations.

Common use of the statement ‘I was misled’

It has been commonplace to hear people say ‘I was misled’. Ordinarily, persons who make this statement do not only intend to be taken seriously, but also to be considered as expressing the objective true state of affairs. The statement, like other related statements such as, ‘I was invited’ (to justify why I came), or ‘I was sent’ (to justify why I went), are reports of actions done to the reporter by another causal agent that has allegedly determined their response. In the reports, the reporters expects the causal agents to be held responsible for their action. In the Genesis account of how sin came into the world when Yahweh queried Adam, he claimed he would not have eaten fruits from the forbidden tree if he had not been caused to do so by Eve. His defence was ‘the woman you gave me had deceived me to eat it’.³ That is, I was misled by Eve.

A Yoruba story in the second part of the eighth in the two hundred and fifty six *Ifa* verses (*Odu Ifa*) (Karenga (1999, pp. 54-57) has it that a woman named *Ereje* gave birth to three sons: *Erin* (elephant), *Efon* (bufalo) and *Agbo* (ram).⁴ The story goes that one day *Ereje* sent her three on an important errand. On their way, *Sango* (believed among Yoruba people mostly in West Africa to be the divinity of thunder) terrified them and roared at them in the lightening and crashing of the thunder, but both *Erin* and *Efon* escaped into the forest and they missed their ways in the forest and they have since continued to live in the forest ever after. In that story, *Agbo*, though the weakest and smallest of the three, dared *Sango*. When *Sango* roared at *Agbo*, *Agbo* confidently roared back at *Sango*. *Sango* became stupefied by the unexpected courage of *Agbo*, and became paranoid. *Sango* withdrew, and *Agbo* returned home victorious and lived as a domestic creature ever after. When *Erin* and *Efon* were questioned, each one claimed ‘I was threatened by the dreadful and deadly *Sango*’ (a variant of ‘I was misled’). The unending controversy between Afrocentric (Afro-apologists) and Afro-pessimists regarding whether colonialism is the cause of the present challenging state of post-colonial Africa is also a variant of the statement (compare Chinua Achebe (1984, p. 1, and Ahmed Sekou Toure (as captured in Walter Rodney (1972, p. 103).

Aye l’oja Ofun ni le. See Afe Adogame ‘Aye loja, orun nile’ (2000; see also Cornelius Olusegun Oyemomilara, 2012, pp. 55-56).

² Immanuel Kant (as presented in Frederick Copleston, 1994), Bertrand Russell (Hans-Johann Glock Edmond Husserl (as presented by J.E. Albert) see philosophy in different ways for instance.

³ Genesis account (3:11-12)

⁴ Usually, in Yoruba traditional folktales, the human person is often represented by animals (Lawuyi, 1988, pp. 29-40).

Logical and practical implications

Usually, the statement 'I was misled' is expected to have been made by a human agent or by a non-human agent programmed at least to simulate a human being. There could be numerous variations and interpretations of the statement, 'I was misled', as there could be numerous intentions for making it. However, the numerous intentions for making the statement and the countless interpretations that can be given to it could be summarised in two ways.

1. That the one who makes the statement should be taken seriously as expressing the truth, and that the action should be blamed on someone else.
2. To simply further mislead people into believing that another agent is entirely responsible for his or her decision.

The statement is often made without taking cognisance of the logical implications of entertaining the belief and of the statement itself being true.

Before examining the implications of accepting the statement as an expression of truth and of the statement being the true state of affairs, it is important to examine the meaning of causation since it forms the basis upon which humans could mislead others or be misled by others. Causation is a very complex event (Casini, 2012, pp. 203-219) and the debate around it has remained in the philosophy parlance ever since Heraclitus in ancient Greek philosophy. In a cause and effect relation the cause determines its own effect (Lewis, 1973, pp. 556-67). Whatever happens to an effect is always an instance of the cause. It seems ridiculous to think of a cause and effect relation in which the cause could be excused from whatever happened to the effect or in which the effect has its freedom to be different from whatever the cause determines it to be. To imagine a free effect in a cause/effect relation is to think of something other than causation or of a different cosmic order all together.

For instance, if a poverty-stricken man, who also has a severe medical condition, is assaulted by the police and loses his only son, and dies shortly, many will attribute the death of this poor man to some or all (causal pluralism) the unfortunate phenomena that befell the him; poverty, ailment, assault and loss of son. Others will attribute his death to a single phenomenon among or aside the ones listed (causal minism). Reference to the four phenomena as the cause of the man's death becomes questionable because the death could still have occurred without any or all the events and another man could still have survived all of them.

More importantly, however, let us assume that truly the man's death was caused by the four factors. It cannot at the same time be true that one of them (e.g. shock from the loss of his son) killed him regardless of the chronological proximity between the occurrence of the two events (death of son and death of the man). We cannot also take the severity of his ailment alone as a reason for identifying his chronic ailment as the cause of his death. As long as it is true that all the events merely contributed we cannot identify one or some of them. Taken individually none of them is the cause. On the other hand, if truly his death had been caused by a combination of all of them it would mean that he would not have died had any one of the events not occurred. Consequently, the possibility of a plurality of causes for a single event as described in Psillos and Williamson is inaccurate. According to Psillos (2008, p. 1):

Most of the philosophical discussion about the metaphysics of causation has been dominated by what I call the 'straightjacket': the view that there is a single, unified and all-encompassing metaphysical story to be told as to what causation is. a view that can be traced back to G. E. M. Anscombe.

Williamson (2006, pp. 69-96) also argues that the indicators of causality are several and disparate.

There are implications if the statement 'I was misled' is taken as being true and these implications are usually not easily recognised by common users. The statement 'I was misled' ordinarily differs from such related statements as 'I was forced', 'I was physically squashed' or 'I was mentally bullied' such as is the case with hypnotising. Being misled does not necessarily involve any form of violence or direct force and it does not express any form of incapacitation at taking a decision. It only involves an act of giving or receiving wrong advice. Common users of the concept will therefore want to make us believe that the relation involves some sort of causal determinism⁵, when it does not necessarily do so. Consequently, the statement 'I was misled' is ethically significant: it could be made in ignorance and could be made to deceive the listeners.

It may be difficult to know whether the statement is merely a false allegation and a mischief or not. At any rate it implies that the misled person would have taken a different course of action had he/she not been deceived through some form of craftiness. While the concept 'misled' or 'to be misled' does not necessarily imply any form of violence or force of denial of freedom of choice, the claim to have been misled provides a psychological picture of something of equal seriousness. It claims that a sort of unique relationship exists in which the action of an innocent person has been causally determined by another irresistible malevolent agent contrary to the person's own volition (Mackie, 1965, pp. 245-264). By implication, the possibility of being misled is conceptually related to the problem of causal determinism (Shanks, 1991, pp. 37-44; Menzies, 1989, pp. 642-63; Cartwright, 1973, pp. 419-38; Davidson, 1967, pp. 691-703; Russell, 1912, pp.1-26). It means that the determined agent is innocent while the cause takes all the guilt. The statement 'I was misled' is ethically significant and it is an expression of determinism. Like in any cause/effect relation, the person claiming to have been misled is indirectly claiming to have been determined and therefore not responsible for the action in question.

To begin with, if a person says 'I was misled' and the person feels that the one who misleads should carry all the blame, the implication is that the statement intends to express a feeling of determinism. That being the case, the statement can only be made by a person who believes human actions can be determined by an external agent without necessarily exerting physical or mental force. For instance, if I do not believe that human actions could be determined by another, I may not be able to state that mine has been determined by another. If I say so without believing it, it would mean that I merely utter the statement to deceive. Therefore, anyone who blames another person for his/her action also believes in the possibility of determinism.

⁵ Causal determinism is a belief that the world is governed, determined and fixed as a matter of some natural laws.

As an expression of determinism, the concept 'misled' could be something that actually happens. That is, it has an existence which is independent of the thinking mind. It could also be something without existence outside of the mind of the one who thinks or expresses it. That is, its existence is contingent upon the one who believes, thinks or expresses it. Whether it has an independent existence or merely a contingent existence, its existence at least resides somewhere. In addition, it is assumed that whoever expresses it also believes it. Otherwise, it becomes a moral case of the deliberate intention to lie and to deceive.

Although as a moral case it has a remarkable moral significance which is worth examining, it is not of much interest to this discussion. This discussion focuses on the statement as an expression of truth (either as independent or as contingent) which cannot be epistemologically guaranteed when the one who expresses it does not believe it. Our interest therefore is on the statement being an expression of real truth and as an expression of a mind dependent idea. That is, we are interested in the statement as an expression of an honest belief (rather than as an intention to lie or deceive) by the one who utters the statement. Let us assume that some people do not say things that they do not believe to be true. That is, no one would say that people are causally determined by others when they do not believe it is possible to be determined by other people. Let us refer to those who use the statement and believe it to be possible as 'honest users' (HUs). Let us refer to those who use it without believing it as 'non-honest users' (NHUs). The interest here is on the HUs. In the HU community, it would mean that whoever makes the statement 'I was misled' also believes that a person could be, against his own volition and consent, causally determined by another. That is, the statement is uttered in that circumstance, by someone who believes that a person's action could be causally determined by another without the knowledge and consent of the person determined.

Furthermore, the only way in which people could be causally determined without using a physical force is to prevent the alleged causally determined person from being aware of the antics of the cause. That is, the person caused must have been totally ignorant of the fact that he/she is being caused, deceived or determined. This is because I cannot imagine myself knowing that someone is causing me without any insurmountable force, to do what I do not consent to and at the same time fall into it, and still expects my tempter to be held responsible for something I have done with the knowledge of its consequence. This would imply that when a person says 'I was misled', he means to say 'though I was ignorant of the plot being carried out against me by so and so person, I got to know of it when the deed had been done'.

Since the caused person (victim) only got to discover the causal influence after he/she had responded mechanically to the causal influence the first time, it may be difficult at any future point to identify whether s/he is under the causal influence or not. That is, if a person was once under a causal influence and did not realise it until s/he had acted under the causal influence of the agent, how do we know with certainty that all subsequent actions that the person takes including the present one are also not carried out under the same circumstance? Put differently, if it is true that a person is under the influence of a cause now, how can we know with certainty when one is not under the influence of a causal agent in the future? That is, if a person says to you before he took his decision 'you can trust that I know what I am doing and that I will always take the right steps' and comes around to apologise 'I am sorry

I was misled into taking a wrong decision, and I did not realise my mistake until it was too late', how can you at any future time be sure that the same person is taking the right decision or is not being misled (determined) as was in the previous case?

The person in question is trying to put up a defence of his action, and we find out or assume that it was true that s/he did what he was accused of under a causal influence. The problem therefore arises, how can we ascertain that even the statement 'I was misled' has not also been uttered under another causal influence? For instance, when a woman who had pregnancy complications or a political representative who was accused of misappropriation comes up and says 'I was misled', how can we know whether the statement 'I was misled' is not itself an expression of a causal influence? It means we cannot take his/her statement seriously because we cannot be sure that the statement is not itself an expression of the same causal influence. That is, we have no way of knowing that the statement 'I was misled' is not also a product of some misleading antics.

Consequently, if the statement 'I was misled' is true, it would mean that we cannot vouch that even the statement itself is an expression made out of the volition of the person who alters it. Unfortunately, a statement which is only a mechanical response to a causal influence cannot be a reliable expression of truth. Therefore whoever says 'I was misled' may not be making any epistemologically valuable statement because: (a) s/he believes causal determinism is possible, (b) s/he is a victim of causal determinism, (c) there is no way to ascertain that the statement itself has not been made under the same influence.

The condition for accepting the truth and consequently attaching some epistemological significance to the statement 'I was misled' is to specify the condition under which the person who had previously been free could now come under the influence of a cause in this present situation. If the person is not able to specify this, then it would mean either that the statement 'I was misled' is false (that is, s/he has always been free and is still free now) or it is entirely false that he was never free and it is true that s/he is still under the causal influence now.

As argued earlier, it may be important to note that once a person is causally determined in one aspect, we can assume that s/he is entirely determined in all other aspects. For instance, after serving three years of a four-year term, a Senator was discovered to have been aided by KUVIC MATOV International (a cyber/internet service company from the Arabian Peninsula) in manipulating the electoral register that gave him victory at the poll. After his dismissal from office, he claimed that he had been misled by advisers who had deceived him into employing the services of the cyber-related company. If we assume that it was true that the dismissed Senator was causally determined by his mischievous advisers to recruit KUVIC MATOV, then we cannot expect the causal influence on the Senator to have ended there. If p causes q and q causes r , it follows that p causes r ($p \supset q$) . ($q \supset r$) $\therefore P \supset r$ } or that r is contingent upon p . It means that whatever causally determined the victory also determined whatever he did with his electoral mandate and thereafter. Hence, to be causally determined in one thing is to be causally determined all round afterwards. Therefore, to be caused in one thing is to be caused in all. If a person who was once caused to do something now claims to be giving a free report of an event that person has to explain how s/he has escaped the influence of the insurmountable causal influence that once betided him/her without his/her volition at the first instance. This becomes necessary because it is unimaginable that a

person could be influenced in one aspect or at one point or situation and be free in another thereafter. For instance, if I have been made to wake up as early as 6am, then all my actions and choices made that day have also been caused by whatever had caused me to wake up at 6 am. My fate could have been different if I had woken up by 11am or at any time other than 6am. The dismissed Senator therefore has to explain how his claim that he was misled by his advisers is itself not a statement under a causal influence. Consequently, if it is actually true that the dismissed Senator was determined by his advisers but is unable to explain how his present report could be a free statement, then it could be the case that the report itself is also a mechanical response to a causal influence in which case the report is false because it does not express the truth (freedom is a necessary condition for truth) (Chisholm, 1964).

If therefore it is true that a person was actually misled (causally determined), it would mean that even the report that s/he has been misled (which expectedly came after s/he had been misled) could itself also have been causally determined. Since whatever has been causally determined by an external agent is not an objective assessment of the situation, but merely a mechanical reaction to the unpreventable causal force, it is automatically false information. Therefore, if it is true that a person was misled, then it is false that the person was misled. The simple explanation for this is that since he believes in causal determinism and it is true that s/he was causally determined (misled), and we have also seen that to be causally determined in one thing is to be possibly causally determined in other things thereafter, it would imply that the statement itself is a mechanical response to the causal influence, which is necessarily a false presentation of the situation. Hence, the truth of the statement 'I was misled' also implies its falsity, and if the statement is false then it is true that the person was misled.

To investigate a phenomenon of causal claim, one would expect the investigator who is an outsider to depend on the testimony of the one who had firsthand information of the experience. If the one who experienced the causal influence says 'I was misled', it would logically imply that that statement cannot be taken seriously. The reason is that at the moment he/she was being misled, he/she was not aware of the antics of the adversary. The awareness came only after the deed had been done. Therefore, s/he cannot say with certainty that what he is telling the investigator is not (like the initial case) a result of the antics of some misleaders to make the statement 'I was misled'. Therefore, the investigator cannot depend on the evidence of someone who cannot vouch that he is not under some causal influence. That is, the investigator cannot rely on the evidence of someone who cannot vouch for his/her own statement and action. If a lawyer says for instance 'my client says she was misled', such an epistemologically meaningless statement cannot be legally significant because it may have been uttered mechanically in response to some causal influence.

Put differently, when a person says 'I was misled.' That agent is saying that someone else should be blamed for my action because the agent made me do what I would not have chosen to do willfully. It also amounts to admitting that the external agent in question is more powerful, skillful, or intelligent and therefore should be blamed. If it is not true that the causal agent has superior intelligence, skill or strength, then, it would imply that the victim was stronger, more skillful and intelligent but careless, and therefore should be blamed.

From the foregoing analysis, it could be inferred that whenever a person says 'I was misled', he or she simply means to say 'I did not act on my own volition', 'I am not saying

out of my own volition that I was misled'. Therefore 'it is not the true state of affairs that I was misled'. Since it is not the willful statement of someone whose interest is to tell the truth, it would imply that the statement itself could be false. We therefore have no reason to take the person or his/her statement seriously, since the statement was not made out of freewill and could not be held to be expressing the true state of affairs.

If the truth of a statement implies that it is false, then it would be true only when it is false. Alternatively, the statement 'I was misled' could be a true state of human affairs if and only if the one who makes the statement was not actually misled, but only deceived into believing that he/she was misled. The only condition under which someone who makes the statement (I was misled) could be taken seriously as an expression of truth is if the statement is false. That is, if the statement is true, then it is false and if the statement is false in spite of the belief (I was misled) then the utterance of the one who makes the statement can be taken seriously as the true state of affairs.

Finally, the conditions under which it could be true that a complete (not mentally impaired) person is misled and it would be taken to be a case of determinism is a different case all together. The person who claims to have been caused to do something must be established as being mentally inferior to his/her alleged cause and the person claiming to have been caused must also consent to the disparity in mental capability. A primary school pupil could defend herself on the basis that her mother had caused her to act wrongly. In such a situation the pupil may only explain how her mother lured or coerced her into committing the wrong act. It is also understandable if an aged person makes a similar statement in a certain situation, because it is believed that his physical and mental strength has been compromised by time and nature. However, a full adult individual, an institutional head or a race or an ethnic individual cannot credibly give the same excuse. To do so could indirectly amount to consenting to mental inferiority unless it is discovered that there are some other conditions such as force that are involved in which the victim could never have under any condition acted differently.

The above analysis is an example of some of the complexities involved in the use of language and the possible misuse of it, which requires some critical thinking to unravel, undo or avoid. Although, such clarifications are relevant to many fields including politics and law, making the clarifications is better carried out in philosophy than in any other fields. The place of language analysis in human society cannot be overemphasised. As Edward Sapir (1921) views it, language is the most significant non-instinctive work that the humans mind has evolved. Both Sapir (1951, p. 160) and Whorf (1956, p. 212) further add that the human world is to a large extent a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions built upon the linguistic system of the human mind. Let us assume for instance that analysis of language only helps to prevent misgivings, ensures clarity of thought and expression especially in resolving conflicts. Let us also assume that philosophical analysis is no more than breaking the human world into comprehensible expressions of facts (Moore & Bruder, 1993, p.129). It would mean therefore that the task of understanding the world cannot begin to get off the ground without logical clarification of thought, language and meaning (Ndianefoo, 2011, p. 169). In addition, as attributed to John Austin,

moral philosophy could benefit by ... analysis for two reasons. For one thing, such an analysis could facilitate in developing a more accurate and up-to-date version of human conduct....as a

corollary, it could contribute towards the correction of older and prematurely settled theories.... we are using a sharpened awareness of words to sharpen our perception of... the phenomena (Stumpf & Faisler, 2003, pp. 440-44).

It becomes crucial to understand what it means to do something before we can properly say about it that it is true, false, right or wrong.

Although language is sometimes erroneously not considered to be a social issue, this is an error because one of the most needed and socially employed instruments in human society is language. In some very significant ordering, studies and analysis of language cannot be meaningfully excluded from studies in the field of social and political philosophy. In the words of Battista Mondin:

Man, as has been correctly said, is a symbolic being: beyond the mechanical instruments he creates to dominate the environment that surrounds him, he also creates symbolic instruments to communicate with the human beings with which he coexists. Of the symbolic instruments, the most important is language (2011, pp. 129-130).

If language ranks among the highest instruments in dealing with human affairs, then, even if the only task of philosophy is to sharpen and discover theories of applying the instrument, philosophy should still be ranked among the most useful disciplines, pre-occupied with some of the most needed instruments of human society.

If all that philosophy can do in human society is to provide tools for carrying out such a function as understanding and interpreting the human world, or the most basic tools for understanding the world, then philosophy cannot be validly seen as insignificant to human society. If the ability to carry out such clarifications is limited to a selected few (comparing the number of known philosophers to the entire human society) then the human society that these selected few are trying to salvage would remain in bondage because accepting something as true or accepting its method should be applied, like in the case of sanity, is a game of numbers. For the philosopher to be taken seriously in a society, the majority (who coincidentally are the rulers in the dominant democratic system in the contemporary era) must become philosophers. It must not be assumed that only a small percentage of a society can be philosophers. Rather, efforts must be made to assist the entire society to become philosophers. The majority rulers (by implication) will cautiously guide the remaining few into becoming philosophers. Applying this to any democratic system will be practically difficult for the majority of wise people (philosophers), who coincidentally are the rulers, to elect non-philosophers or foolish and corrupt individuals as their representatives in government. Even if they do, they will also know how to guide the foolish and corrupt representatives towards the development of their community.

Conclusion

The paper performs a logical analysis of the common statement 'I was misled', which people make in a bid to show that it was as a result of someone else's mischief that they did whatever it was they did wrong. It exposes the paradox and logical complications involved in making the statement 'I was misled'. Given the analysis and the appropriateness of its

situated-ness in philosophical discourses, the paper concludes on the one hand that a person may not claim or accept being caused by another agent without also explicitly or implicitly consenting to mental inferiority, and on the other hand that even if philosophy does not do any more than analyse language, it would still have contributed immensely to the intellectual community and ultimately towards the mental emancipation of human society including the theological discourse.

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