

FREEDOM, THE CULTURAL AND EXISTENTIAL DYNAMICS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL ENTERPRISE

Dr. Uwalaka Jude N. (Asso. Prof.)^{1*}, Dr. John Madu²

Directorate of General Studies, Federal University of Technology, Owerri Imo State, Nigeria

***Corresponding Author:** Dr. Uwalaka Jude N. (Asso. Prof.), Directorate of General Studies, Federal University of Technology, Owerri Imo State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

Philosophy is a subject which has suffered great reverses in her history; from the past exalted noble pedigree as the mother of the sciences to the present position in which some do not even grant it the right to exist. The discipline in her mission and ambition of offering ultimate explanations and uncovering basic meaningfulness of things whether in terms of human knowledge, human destiny, the good life and vision of the common good will remain ever relevant in spite of the critique of her detractors. Philosophy will continue to have a faithful audience among those who care for meaningful existence, acceptable social ordering and freedom from the scourges of those things that keep our humanity in bondage. Contrary to some beliefs that philosophy is merely a past-time activity or an elitist preoccupation, philosophy as a rigorous discipline and mode of thinking is open to all who have the love and competence to pursue wisdom and truth. The aim of this article is to show how the various experiences of life can become great catalysts and stimulus for philosophical reflection and how the philosophical task itself is unrealizable except in the environment of freedom.

INTRODUCTION

Philosophy is a search for ultimate explanations in man's quest for meaningful existence and for liberation from the scourges of ignorance and irrationalism. Right from the dawn of human history, man has sought to find explanation for the many challenges and mysteries that confront his existence. This is echoed in these words of Pope John Paul II in his philosophical Encyclical *Fides et Ratio* when he said "A cursory glance at ancient history shows clearly how in different times with their different cultures there arose at the same time the fundamental questions which pervade human life: Who am I? Where have I come from? Where am I going? Why is their evil?"

These are questions that occupy philosopher's mind... these are questions which have their common source in the quest for meaning which always compelled the human heart ..." {*Fides et Ratio* No 1 }.

In the age of science and technology, some feel that philosophy has exhausted its possibilities in providing reliable and helpful response to the various challenges of the human condition which come to him in his many existential challenges, in the upheavals of social and cultural movements and other social political

challenges. However, this cannot be true because the questions that philosophy poses are questions which only philosophy can respond to and questions which will always continue to haunt the human spirit. The material palliatives to these challenges fail to quench this inner cry for clarity and comprehensive response which is indeed a philosophical project.

Philosophy however is not the preserve or special privilege of any race, people or culture but within the capacity of anyone with the competence and desire who wants to pursue it. We intend to lay bare, the Existential, cultural, historical and Experiential conditions that can stimulate the philosophical reflective activity, and to alert us to some conditions that impede it, and equally the necessary reforms cultures and societies must undergo, so that the philosophical spirit may flourish and bear fruit in promoting knowledge, growth, social and cultural progress.

Individual Autonomy And Freedom

Closely related to man's intellectual and knowing capacity is also man's rational desires, which is the will. The rational desire signifies that man consciously is drawn to things in order to possess them or love them as the good, as judged or known by the intellect or reason. Man is the only animal that has the capacity for

abstract thoughts, self-consciousness and freedom (L. Christian 2003 p.338). As the truth is the object of intellectual activity of knowing, so is the good, the object of rational desire or the will. Man naturally desires the good in general, that which is delightful. But the particular he pursues is his choice. The Will offers man the power choice, having control over his life with regard to what he does or whatever he does not want to do. Hence we talk of freewill (Aquinas *Contra Gentiles* 11,48). Freewill in man is the power to choose among alternatives or to act in a certain situation independently of natural or social constraints. A whole pattern of man's existence if it has any meaning at all, implies free choice. Without it, no personal responsibility is possible, no obligation, no moral codes, no law and surely no honest philosophical activity, because philosophical activity implies the idea of intellectual freedom that is, the freedom to exercise intellectual activity without hindrance in the pursuit of truth and goodness. {cf. Daniel J. Sullivan, 1992, p.103-104}.

We know that the issue of freedom is controversial, but what is clear is that without freedom genuine philosophical activity which is the very deep project in reaching the deeper truth of things will be impossible, a mere illusion, a chimera. Truth implies the honest unhindered access to what a thing or issue is really. At origin, philosophy was the rational attempt to understand and explain reality, free from prejudices and unexamined beliefs. As we will later see, philosophy and the promotion of freedom seem to have been given birth at the same time.

This means that both are co-reinforcing and co-generating. This intimate relationship and mutual advancement of freedom and philosophy is attested to in the historical context in the emergence of philosophy in Greece.

From the 8th Century B.C, a new political Order started to emerge in Greece different from the older order governed by Priests/Kings which ended two centuries later with the installation of the democratic order which favoured confrontation and the critique of ideas between free men who were citizens of democratic cities. With democracy also, the occult private practices and the secret mystery religious cults were violated.

This democracy as Vernant observed demanded the publicity of knowledge and its sharing among free men in the Agora as objects of

debate. Certainly for him, publicity, free discussion, the critique of opinions were necessary if not sufficient condition and ingredients for the development of rational knowledge. Debates awakened an interest in the laws of thinking, in logic and the rhetorical art of thinking; the knowledge which helped one to prevail over political adversaries and as Karl Marx said "the first necessity of philosophical investigation is a bold free mind.{Marx K,-Frederich Engels, 1976. P.469}.

The above buttresses the observation of Karl Popper that philosophy involved a tradition of discussion and rational debates, astonishing freedom, creativity, open criticism, the audacity to challenge opinions, change narratives when necessary. {Karl Popper, 1963, p.122}. The other side of the expansion of freedom by philosophy has equally been upheld by thinkers of note like Nietzsche and Hegel who in spite of some controversial elements in their philosophies claim that comprehensive freedom is achieved through philosophical practice.

The question is, what is this freedom in which as it is observed that philosophical reflection and bold thinking germinates and flourishes. Perhaps the two distinctions of Isaiah Berlin on freedom will be in order here; negative freedom and positive freedom {Berlin, 1, 1958}

The idea of negative freedom is that a man is free to the extent that he is not interfered with, or coerced by other human beings {Weinstein W.L, Vol XII, No2, 1965, p.146}. Negative freedom is generally regarded as the classical and orthodox view of freedom and espoused by great thinkers like John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, Adam Smith, James Mill, John Stuart Mill, Tocqueville and Montesquieu although with some nuances. J. S. Mill holds that the individual who owns a fundamental right to freedom shall be able to determine itself in any choice.

He declared "There is a circle around every individual human being, which no government, be it that of one, of the few, or of the many ought to be permitted to overstep...that, there is or ought to be, some space in human existence thus entrenched around, and sacred from authoritarian intrusion, no one who professes the smallest regard to human freedom and dignity will call in question." {Mill, J. S, 1970, p.306}. Kant will reiterate that acting persons are truly free only if their choices are determined by freewill. For R. Dworkin, it means absence of constraints or impediments to self-determination

or conscious choice. {Dworkin, R, 1977}. All these boils down to the fact, that actions should be self-authorized.

Positive freedom on the other hand is the view that not only should one not be coerced or prevented externally against his will but must be capable of carrying out what he chooses. This means the ability of a person to do what he chooses to do with few internal and external impediments as much as possible. Here the individual is his own master. Being free in this positive sense, means removing all hindrances to self-improvement, both intellectually and morally and creating favourable conditions and facilities to the development of men's talents. Thus, T. H. Green who is said to have coined the word positive freedom observed, by freedom "we do not mean merely freedom from restraint or compulsion...we do not mean a freedom that can be enjoyed by one man or by one set of men at the cost of a loss of freedom to others..., we mean a positive power or capacity of doing or enjoying something worth doing or enjoying, and that too something that we do or enjoy in common with others. We mean by it a power which may exercise through the help of security given him by his fellow men and which he in turn helps to secure for them...thus, though of course there can be no freedom among men who act not willingly but under compulsion, yet on the other hand, the mere removal of compulsion, the mere enabling a man to do as he likes, is in itself no contribution to true freedom" {Green T. H, 1889, p.370-372}

Positive freedom then implies the power of self-realization and ability to realize one's full potentialities as human beings. Then true freedom is found only in the man who has mastered himself so that neither the constraint of instinct from within nor the pressure of force from without can make him deviate from his perceived good. One can therefore talk of freedom from the chains of ignorance and vice. The great Socrates comes to mind here who preferred death for his convictions than betrayal to save his life. The combined effect of negative and positive freedoms will make us see freedom in terms of individual autonomy, "acting in terms of one's autonomous self; choices determined by one's free will, emancipation from whatever hinders us in our full expression as human beings, independence of thought, word or deed, a delightful self-determination; autonomy of the individual to hold and express beliefs without fear of social and political punishment". In the words of Hayek, "whether

he is free or not, does not depend on the range of choice, but on whether he can expect to shape his course of action, in accordance with his personal intention or whether somebody else has power to manipulate the conditions so as to make him act to that person's will rather than his own." {Hayek F. A, 1960 p.13}

When we talk of freedom and autonomy of individual, we cannot forget of intellectual freedom which is indispensable in philosophical explanations. This is the freedom which allows people to express their thoughts and ideas without hindrance. It is a deliberate commitment to man's deliberate capacities and commitment to truth and enquiry. To be free intellectually is not only the matter of the absence of constraint but also the positive liberty to develop capacities for deliberation within the social world that both support this pursuit, and the underlying information flows and human investigatory processes that make it possible for information to resolve uncertainty and find truth.

Intellectual freedom is originally connected with the need to protect individuals so as to speak candidly, which express the ancient Greek idea Parrhesia (frank talk). For Plato, virtue of free and open enquiry are part of the method of pursuing truth. To emphasize the importance of intellectual freedom, in the pursuit of truth and growth of knowledge and social progress, philosophers like John Milton, John Locke, John Stuart Mill called for tolerance for candid expression, tolerance for diverse religious view points and the need for free society that promote the growth and spread of knowledge. (John Locke, 1689) (cf. Mark Alfino, June 2, 2010)

Intellectual freedom then demands that nothing should be done to stop freedom of enquiry, of speech, of flow of information and knowledge. Thus, whether in freedom of action or choice or enquiry, all forces of intolerance, of compulsion or interference, coercion are to be combated. The autonomy of insight and reason which is active in each individual is the counter force by which he can escape the tutelage of tradition and the pressure of conformism and authoritarianism. {Hegel, 1967, para.1242}.

In fact, by emphasizing individual autonomy, and self determination, and freedom of choice, this should not be seen as being antisocial or the denial of the place of community or society on the good and flourishing of individuals. What is contested here is a social structure, exercise of power or regulations that suffocates or suppresses individual initiatives, or subjects

them to the whims or caprices of a Leviathan, or a so called infallible leader whose words are laws, or the state intruding into the private life of people; or a so called Rousseau's obedience to the General will.

On the other hand, there is need for a society which creates the conditions for the flourishing of individual freedom and creativity, while punishing offence against the common good. Thus Hayek will hold that under a well constituted legal order, law and freedom are compatible and some minimum coercion may be legitimate as "instrument to prevent violence, fraud, blackmail and so on. The exercise of coercion in these fields is not a threat to the individual who keeps within the rules." (Barry N, p.58). Ferguson wrote about the most effectual application of every just restraint to all members of social Free State.

It is under just restraints only that every person is safe, and cannot be invaded either in the freedom of his person, his property or innocent action {Ferguson 1972, p258}. In short the true exercise of freedom will not involve or inflict harm on others: This is what Karl Popper will call an open society, Kant a rule of law society; which for Locke, a liberal society and for Hayek a Great Society. {Hayek F. A.- W.W. Bartley III (ed) Vol I, 1988, p.6. ;Popper K, (1945), 1984, p.169 ff.}

Knowing philosophy and philosophical activity for what it is, the quest for all comprehensive knowledge, deeper fundamental explanations, and sustained exploration into truth and reality, and from the above synopsis on freedom and individual autonomy and the free society, it becomes self-evident that philosophy is impossible or a mere parody without a free mind and free environment. It can even be said that philosophy and freedom seem to be born together and at the same time. It is not accidental that philosophy flourished in Athens at the beginning given to its democratic set-up and not in Sparta that was more authoritarian. As Russell Coleburt noted the Ionian cities and Athens were for the most part Democratic. The Dorians like Sparta was Oligarchic. Sparta stood by the old Aristocratic life in the land and the dislike for political innovation and intellectual adventures. (Russell Coleburt, 1958, p.12}.

There is no doubt that philosophy is best promoted and stimulated in freedom and a free environment. It is only in such free condition that people can pursue bold and independent thinking capable of attaining the truth of things

which is the ambition of philosophy. It is only in such situation that people can have the moral courage and Will to pursue sustained and unhindered enquiry and research which is the philosophical temperament. Hence for Plato virtue of free and open enquiry are parts of the method of pursuing truth. Freedom liberates us to think differently, offer alternative view points, and escape from the tyranny of the majority, and servitude of superstition and the status quo. Individual autonomy makes one to challenge traditions when he must, have the clarity and understanding to make personal decisions, to be creative and at times to question the status quo. Francis Bacon in his *Direction For The Advancement Of Learning* talked of idols of the mind and holds that Enquiry must be freed from prior constraints such as those imposed by traditional cultures and the illusion of infallibility (Francis Bacon 1605). These are the basic dispositions and elements which stimulate and give rise to philosophical reflection.

A culture where the individual is suppressed cannot give birth to philosophical reflections. For example, where we have militarism, conformism, regimentation, uniformism, philosophical reflection is not compromised because individual initiative and creativity is suppressed. It is in this light that we could appreciate the observation of Theophilus Okere That philosophy is essentially a *mise-en-cause* and rational questioning of the collective image. {Theophilus Okere, 1993}. It is an opposition to any type of collective world view or ethnic thinking which suppresses individual idiosyncrasies and pretends to offer sacred truths to which all must abide. This brings us immediately to the individual and critical nature of philosophy by which it evaluates and examines things or issues for their justifiability, by which it demands for the supporting grounds or establish standards and criteria for knowledge or right conduct, and in which anything is open to critical challenge and scrutiny. This is reward of intellectual freedom.

Furthermore, philosophy goes and deepens, in a free environment, where the flow of knowledge and ideas are unhindered, which allows us to share in the researches, opinions and experience of others and the collision of ideas. Thus Immanuel Kant rightly observed that nothing is required for enlightenment except freedom and the freedom in question is the least harmful of all namely, the freedom to use reason publically in all matters. {Kant Immanuel, 1949}. John

Stuart Mill on his part observed that the person who advocates suppression of enquiry because he claims to have the truth is not acting consistently with the process that produce truth even if he is not assuming infallibility which for him is by social process of discussion, interpretation and the collision of our ideas with others. {Mill J. S, XVIII, 232., 1956}. Hence we get justified certainty, which is of course, the ambition of philosophy by “corrigibility, open-mindedness and epistemological modesty {Finochiaro Maurice A. 2005, p. 18-21}

Freedom thus increases the stock of social knowledge and thus expands our possibility of more comprehensive and inclusive vision of things and perspectives, and increases a better appreciation of issues. Hayek will observe that freedom means the renunciation of direct control of individual effort that a free society can make use of much knowledge than of one mind of the wisest Ruler could comprehend. {Hayek F. A, p.91}. This agrees with the position of Michael Polanyi and Karl Popper that the freedom of action granted to each enables men to refute by their proper experience some held old knowledge, thus inciting them to new hypothesis, more experimentation which leads to the growth of knowledge. A process which Hayek and Popper called the trial and error process, a process which leads to the growth of social knowledge which will be at the disposal of all to achieve their private goals. {Karl Popper (1945) 1984} - Polanyi, 1958}

This openness to new knowledge or new ideas is surely the secret of civilization and progress and surely philosophical progress and fecundity.

Crisis and Existential Shock

Crisis brings men out of the meaningful security of their lives. This brings problems to our attention, and task our rational efforts for comprehension and explanation, which is an important aspect of the philosophical project. Crisis sensitizes man. Awareness and confrontation with existential issues like problem of evil, death of a loved one; the suffering of the innocent; the collapse of fortunes, grave illness and other ultimate situations that put man on the borderline (despair), make man to experience his nothingness, powerlessness, the ephemerality of our world and raises serious issues of man's self a understanding and his worldhood. Man is led by the above circumstances of existence in the meaning and value of life to postulate how to live out his life to achieve liberation, peace and

to find authenticity. The struggle to find meaning is too complex for any vacuous or superficial solutions. If the struggle for meaning is treated with scanty and shallow intelligence, the mind becomes captive in the inescapable clutches of despair and purposelessness. There are questions that task the intelligence and challenges it to look for deeper solutions.

This has led to many types of philosophical reflections and responses especially from the group called the Existentialists like Soren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, Karl Jaspers, etc. The Existentialists are concerned with the meaning of existence and what it is like to be human They confront issues like dread, boredom alienation, the absurd, freedom, commitment and materialism. . Can one find meaning to life in a seemingly absurd universe?.

Martin Heidegger in his book Being and Time (1927) posed the question of why something rather than nothing? Humans are the only Beings in the world who can stand out from the world to ask this question with sense of responsibility and concern (sorge) which can be the cause of Dread (Angst). The greatest dread is death to which human beings are oriented. Death is the horizon of living that gives life, its sense of urgency. If man must achieve authenticity, it must reconcile with death or lose himself or herself in the variety of outside pressures that try to deny him freedom.

For Jean Paul Satre in his books Nausea (1940) and Being and Nothingness (1943) humans are alienated and anguished in the face of a world that is ultimately absurd. Albert Camus in his works like the Myth of Sisyphus (1942) and others like The Rebel (1951) developed the Philosophy of the Absurd. He declared “judging whether life is or not worth living amount to answering the fundamental question of Philosophy. All the rest, whether or not the world has three dimensions, whether the mind has nine or twelve categories come afterwards. These are games...“I have never seen anyone die from ontological argument. The meaning of life is the most urgent of the questions.” (Albert Camus, 1955 p.35)

Can one find meaning to life in this absurd universe and go on living and avoid suicide?. This was the question that preoccupied Camus and other Philosophers. We find the same philosophically charged question even in the Bible, when the author of Ecclesiastes after reviewing life declared “Vanity of Vanity, all is

Vanity” (Eccl 1:2). Job’s suffering made him to ask “why bad things happen to good people?”. Sometimes it takes a shock to take us out of an obsession with day-to-day interests and concerns, to take a step back and become aware of the challenges of existence. In short, taking a philosophical distance, Karl Jaspers points to such moments in our lives like birth, marriage, death, etc, when we become aware that we do not really know everything there is to know. When even the most hardened realist or cynic becomes aware that there are major gaps in our experience and mysteries to be thought about. These experiences can bring about a sense of mystery and wonder that can lead to philosophical questioning. (Karl Jaspers, 1973 p.17-20).

Martin Buber in his book *I & Thou* (1923) proposed that humans could achieve meaning, happiness and reconciliation with existence through love and relationship. We equally note the proposal of Gabriel Marcel a Christian existentialist in his book *Mystery of Being* 1951 and *Man Against Mass Society* 1953, who argues that humans must struggle to protect their subjectivity from annihilation by modern materialism. We have presented these selected philosophical outputs of these great philosophers to show how existential struggles and shocks lead to reflections of great philosophical depth a real tonic or stimulus to philosophical reflection.

The Failure of Old Certainties and Emergence of New Facts

It is a well known aphorism that the only permanent reality is change. Many times, new information, experiences and facts can emerge which shatter our horizon and question our assumptions. This has been a part of the history of men as he journeys from the ancient mythologies to our scientific certainties which often become overwhelmed. In fact, the history of science is littered by the graves of dead theories. Hence, frequent changes in science. These changes surely affect life, decision, values, hence the effort to find new visions and explanations. This is how new philosophies emerge. This is so because, the situation where old certainties fail and new observations or apparent facts emerge, will surely make us look behind our system of order, which could necessitate new reflections and attempts at reconciliation or a reinterpretation or even a reorganization of some of our knowledge claims. It could even lead to total abandonment

of the status quo. Philosophical thinking does not start in a vacuum but can be a critical re-organization and reconstruction of beliefs, values and the standard of a culture and the material on which to work in the face of challenges, by fresh experiences and novel ideas. For example, today we have whole areas of the Philosophy of science which seeks to understand reality in the light of our present scientific claims, unanswered questions provoked by such claims. This made Thomas Kuhn to articulate the logic of scientific progress in terms of periodic revolutions and paradigm shifts, which seems to rejoin Hegel’s philosophy of history in terms of the dialectical process of thesis, Anti-thesis and Synthesis.

Philosophy thus arises from the strife of ideas, and experiences force man to question his fundamental assumptions. The father of modern Philosophy Rene Descartes was provoked to new philosophical methodology and orientation in the realization that there is nothing he has learnt from his upbringing and studies that cannot be doubted. He said “several years have now passed since I first realize how numerous were the false opinions that in my youth I had taken to be true and thus how doubtful were all those that I subsequently built upon them. And thus, I realize that once in my life, I had to raze everything to the ground and begin again from the original foundation if I wanted to establish anything firm and lasting in the sciences. Descartes will then adopt the methodic doubt as a way to establish any knowledge that is certain. The methodic doubt gave room to critical examination of knowledge. This is not doubt for the sake of doubt but a doubt to purify knowledge or distinguish knowledge from non-knowledge. He insisted on doubting any claim in order to force it to defend itself and produce the indubitable. This is an example of how uncertainties in knowledge and doubt can be a source of philosophical reflection and growth. From the foreground, we can thus establish that the emergence of novelties and other experiences can pave way to doubts, doubting our presuppositions. Since Descartes, human knowledge has been besieged by philosophies of suspicion and skepticism and epistemologies centered on the subjects of what can we know and the limit of our knowledge. This is why a lot of philosophical efforts have gone in such problems like the problem of perception, problem of truth, the reality of human testimonies etc, which can mar or make our knowledge claims and in many cases led to

thorough-going re-examination of our knowledge.

Historical-Cultural Dynamics and the Hermeneutical Principle

Another area worth considering in articulating the condition for the possibility of philosophical thought is in the realm of historical, social and cultural changes. History is full of cultural and social upheavals and movements which normally create instability at the social, material, political and cognitive levels for as it is said, culture is dynamic and no culture dictates its own future. Human Beings are always free to accept, reject or redeploy their inheritance (Nicholas Capaldi 2009, p.103). In the history of Western Societies, a clear example is in the great movements of the renaissance, the enlightenment, the change from feudalism to capitalism, from the classical world of modernity to the contemporary opposed vision of post-modernity. Lonergan thus observed that Western culture had undergone a profound cultural shift from classical to modern, to post-modern. This overlaying of the old with the new is visible in every area of human endeavor from music, arts, literature to poetry, philosophy and theology. Modernity unlike the classical does not regard itself as normative and fixed, but as plastic, relative and developing.

Every cultural shift presents new challenges for man and his self-understanding and could bring about philosophical paradigm shift. The history of Philosophy is a part of the history of culture. For philosophy operates in the cultural circle of people, beliefs, ethics and artifacts. The philosophers philosophize on what is available to them. This philosophical thinking was on occasion described as the intellectual expression of the process of cultural change. Social and cultural changes no matter their sources become a great moment which elicits philosophical reflection either in the attempt to understand the meaning of events, to situate the events in the overall historical process, people's self-understanding and interests; to articulate if possible the social, cultural or political changes or reform which the events necessitate and how they reconnect or link up the present with the past.

All these require hard thinking to understand the forces at work and offer a historical and cultural response. This is how philosophy is blessed with harvest philosophical theories in the area of society, politics, culture, value, history. One thinks immediately of materialist philosophies

of history and progress like in Marxism, Capitalist economic philosophies like in Adam Smith, Critical Social theories like that of Marx Hockheimer, Theodore Adorno, Eric Fromm; we think of Hannah Arendt, Jurgen Habermas; there are hermeneutical theories as in Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur. We have post-modernist philosophical theories like Reconstructionism like Jacques Derrida, Jean Francois Lyotard, Michel Foucault. In fact, the great Ages of Philosophy and the great Philosophers were responding to much larger intellectual challenges. For example it is impossible to understand modern Philosophy, that is, the Philosophy of the sixteenth through the eighteenth Centuries, unless one realizes the extent to which that philosophy was a response to development in modern Science (Nicholas Capaldi 2009, p.109). All these were Philosophical attempts to understand man and his action in the flow of historical and cultural changes and articulating how to live and organize our lives within these cultural and historical dynamics.

Cultural Dynamics and Philosophical Hermeneutics

Cultural and social dynamics has equally been a part of the African world as she moved from the experience of colonialism to post-colonialism, from Eurocentric narratives to the attempt to rediscover African self-consciousness, identity and Authenticity, especially the challenges of modernity to African cultures. This has also produced massive philosophical responses like Nkurumah's Consciencism, Senghor's Negritude, Nyerere's humanism, African contextualism and Hermeneutics. Let us consider in particular the response of philosophical hermeneutics and how it has been applied as a philosophical method and process of adapting to cultural changes;

In relating philosophy to culture and novelty, some today have opted for philosophy as a hermeneutics of culture. Here philosophy does not lie in recycling old beliefs or cultural ideas as past intuitions but in interpretation. Here philosophy is seen as a theory of interpretation of reality (macro-hermeneutics); as a theory of the interpretation of texts (cultures, scriptures, etc).

The notion of *verstehen* by Greek thinkers and philosophers like Dilthey, Weber, historian philosophers like Collingwood or philosophers like Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Oakeshott and Hans Gadamer makes it clear that all

understanding, even in science is interpretation. It is becoming increasingly recognized that we are immersed in a world, in which our interactions require an interpretative response from our part, in which also our freedom and possibility are implicated. This interpretative response does not occur in a vacuum but originates in a cultural context which is social and historical. Of course the culture itself is not the final arbiter.

“This cultural context is itself something that we confront, that must be apprehended. In the course of the apprehension, we are free to recognize its dissonant voice and internal tensions, to challenge part of the cultural context, to reject part of it, to modify part of it. We are also free to extend the cultural context in ways that are not dictated by the context itself. What we are not free to do is to pretend that we can stand outside all frames of reference and by the appeal to an alleged autonomous reason privileged certain practices and de-legitimate others. (Capaldi 2009, p. 120-121).

For Oakeshott, our inheritance is a set of cultural achievements and practices, not a doctrine to be learned. The inheritance is recreated through appropriation, is not homogenous and has no definitive formulation. The great authors do not speak as one voice with one message, but they also provide the context which we achieve and sustain our freedom. (Capaldi 2009, p.127).

Hans Gadamer one of the architects of modern hermeneutics, gives an insight into what hermeneutics, as a philosophical method is all about. For him, every encounter with an ancient text or tradition takes place in historical consciousness, involves the experience of the tension between the text and the present, between what the ancient author wanted to convey and how the present reader interprets the text, with all the prejudices of his socio-historical situatedness. Any understanding takes place within a horizon of already granted meanings and intention which is called the areas of pre-understanding. Hans-George Gadamer, in his *Truth and Method* (1960) proposed the hermeneutical circle as a necessary key to correct interpretation, leading to a “fusing of horizons”. (Egan .P. 2009 p.119)

According to Gadamer, the meaning of a text always goes beyond its author so that understanding can never mean mere reproduction, but production. Hence, we see the necessity of dialogue, in the act of interpretative

understanding (a never ending conversation). Some African philosophers like T. Okere and T. Senay serequeberhan has defended hermeneutics as the appropriate philosophical approach to African, philosophy, especially in relating philosophy to African tradition. The goal is not to bring back the past but it recreates African culture. It is less a retrieval of the past than a renaissance for the simple reason that includes the challenge of novelty of change and modernity.

In his articulation of philosophy as an arbitrator of tradition and modernity via the hermeneutical spirit, professor Okere further said that philosophy is so related and dependent on its cultural universe that each genuine philosophy would have to grow and evolve from a particular culture, But it is not enough to have a culture in order to have also philosophy. A mediation, a passage from culture to philosophy is necessary. For him any question of the relationship between culture and philosophy is a hermeneutical problem and calls for appropriate method of procedure. Hermeneutics that is interpretation is the mediating factor between the two poles.

Prof. Okere would conclude, "philosophical reflection is the process of explicitation, an uncovering, a disclosure" an unfolding of the meaning and sense implied in their objectifications of life which are symbols. Reflection means *implicita explicare* — making the implicit explicit. African culture have their own symbols, pregnant with meaning. A reflection on these symbols with a view of making the implicit meaning explicit would constitute African Philosophy” (Okere T. 1983 p.82). Of course philosophy as hermeneutics has been criticized for its impasse on truth, truth which is the philosophical goal. Hermeneutics has been criticized of being indecisive about truth, as leading to certain relativism, as the denial of universality of philosophy. Prof. Okere acknowledged this partially when he said "the historicity and relativity of truth and this always means truth as we can and do attain it, is one of the main insights of the hermeneutical revolution in philosophy, and it is in it that this thesis hangs. (Okere T. 1983 p.24)

The above statement could be misconstrued as some do to mean that truth in philosophy is not trans-cultural or trans historical. I think we should read the statement as meaning that no one culture has the monopoly of truth, or can grasp the absolute /truth, or exhasust the truth.

The emphasis is on truth as "we can and do attain it". Our interest here however, is the extent to which culture and culture change can inspire philosophical reflection. There is no doubt that philosophy has a vocation for the truth and the universal, but the originating soil may be diverse.

CONCLUSION

Philosophy as the project of understanding and explanation is a noble tool in the hand of man and man's ever relevant need to make meaning of his life and world. Through it man responds to the challenge and imperative of bringing sanity to the chaos of man's multiple experiences, to the existential call for him to face his destiny as Being-in-the-world and to his unquenchable desire for immortality. He must live with his fellow humans which in itself is both a burden and also a source of delight by helping him break out of the insanity of a lonely existence. Philosophy will never end as far as there remains deep human and existential questions to be answered which never gets lesser but more as every thesis of life promotes its antithesis, every progress its backlash and every victory its defeat. The dialectics of life makes endless questions possible. Philosophy will remain a persistent human engagement. Philosophy may be less attractive in our growing techno, pragmatic, functionalistic and materialistic contemporary culture, but as an engagement of the rational being which we are as humans, will remain part of the human condition. Every age will always have their great philosophers and visionaries and critiques; let philosophizing go on.

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