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This Journal is not an organ of any particular Philosophical School of thought. Its aim is to be an outlet through which the results of scholarly researches in philosophy are made available to professional philosophers both within and outside Africa, and a forum for the exchange of philosophical ideas. The Journal therefore encourages and welcomes scholarly research in any branch of philosophy. Book reviews and advertisement are also welcome.

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# AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY : A CRITIQUE OF THE AFRICAN LOGICAL NEO POSITIVISM MODEL

BY

SAMUEL ADE ALI

## Introduction

The question of African philosophy is as old as philosophy in Africa. It is just about two decades now that the question of African philosophy emerged. At first, the question appears to be a very simple one with a modest answer in sight. At another, the philosophical nature of the question becomes apparent. However, the debates over the question mark a turning point in the history of philosophical discourse in Africa. Emerging from the discussion of the question is a thorough search for a typical African philosophy. This search, I believe, prompts an exchange of philosophic ideas on the intrinsic subject of philosophy as it affects African continent. The fruit of these discussions of the question of African philosophy has been a total reconstruction of a formidable philosophy for Africa by the African professional philosophers. And, the birth of some methodological paradigms, theories and approaches which authentically distinguish African philosophy from Western philosophy.

The aim of this paper is to argue and defend how the unabated debates over the question of African philosophy have led to the inevitable establishment of philosophy in Africa against the contrary position maintained by the 'African logical neo-positivist thinkers', a terminology adopted by Dr. C. S. Momoh to describe the nonconformists in African philosophy. In the process, we account for why the question emerged in the first place, why it promoted an intractable controversy and why the controversy hardly exists now. Finally, an antidote on what needs to be done by African professional philosophers to concretize the foundation upon which the African philosophy has been laid using the existing philosophical tools or perhaps propose a new rubric of philosophical tools or perhaps propose a new rubric of philosophical system.

## II. THE PHILOSOPHICAL NATURE OF THE QUESTION OF AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy is essentially a reflective activity. To philosophize is to reflect on human experience in search of answers to some fundamental questions.<sup>1</sup> This position illuminates the current philosophical cogitation under the auspices of African philosophy. The reason why the compound

question, "Is there an African philosophy, If there is, what is it?" attracts the curious mind in Africa and beyond is because the question itself is a philosophical one. In addition the question is as abtruse and philosophically perplexing as the nature of philosophy.

We ask, what indeed makes a question philosophical? This question automatically calls for no other thing than the nature of philosophical question contradistinguished from other forms of questions. There are two forms of questions namely: the empirical question and the conceptual question. The empirical question is a first order question. It is a form of questions which dominates the physical sciences or any empirical study. Given the nature of such questions, they are resolvable by direct observation, mathematical precision or by the application of physical laws. for example:

- a. It is the case that it is raining outside.
- b.  $2 + 2 = 4$
- c. Water boils at  $100^{\circ}\text{C}$  under normal pressure.

Conversely, the conceptual questions otherwise called normative question is a form of second order questions. The nature of this question is fundamentally philosophical. Such question can not be empirically or contingently resolved but by a recourse to a priori method. In nature, the second order question is distinct from the first order question of contingent nature because the claim to it is never absolutely conclusive. For this reason, we say such question, by nature is philosophical. Hence, the question, "Is there an African philosophy?" is as normative and philosophically fundamental as any other philosophical questions: What is number? Does God exist? What is the purpose of life? We have this form of questions of philosophically perplexing nature constituting the realm of ethics, metaphysics, epistemology, aesthetics, philosophical psychology, political philosophy et al. The tendency to reflect on such fundamentally philosophical questions, writes Dr. Omoregbe, is part of human nature, it is rooted in man's natural instinct of curiosity-the instinct to know.<sup>2</sup> Isaiah Berlin on the subject matter of philosophy posits:

*those who ask such question are faced with a perplexity from the very beginning. They do not know where to look for the answers, there are no dictionaries, encyclopedias, compendia of knowledge, none orthodoxies which can be referred to with confidence as possessing unquestionable authority or knowledge in these matters.<sup>3</sup>*

It is in this sense that the question of African philosophy qualifies as a

philosophical question. From the debate over the question, the tendency of having a universal agreement is possibly remote. Sidney Hook, a great American naturalist philosopher says on the nature, definition and subject matter of philosophy that any definition pre-supposed some conception not likely to be shared by all philosophers.<sup>4</sup> It is the inquisitiveness to resolve the normative question of African philosophy that has generated among African philosophers some approaches and subsequent division of these thinkers into some ideological camps.

### III. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

In his discussion of African philosophy, Dr. C. S. Momoh<sup>5</sup> identifies three major schools as follows:

1. **The African Logical Neo-positivism School:** The prominent members of this school include Professors P. O. Bodunrin, Kwasi Wiredu, Paulin Hountondji, Robin Horton and possibly Professor Makinde who is often classified as quasi African philosophy but still contests what the form, content and context of African philosophy should look like. It is the contention of this school that African philosophy should maintain a clear break with the past and rest only on the works of professional philosophers in African philosophy as its substance. African philosophy as it is today according to this group of philosophers is pejoratively and epithetically mythological.
2. **The Theological School:** This school consists of Professors W. E. Abraham, Fr. Temples, and Professor Chukwudum B. Okolo. The claim of this school is that the existence of African philosophy is closely tied with the advent or evolution of formal education, missionary activities and the writings of anthropologists and colonial scholars in Africa. One presupposition from the position of this school of thought is that the root of African philosophy does not lie in the African tradition but in the works of Colonial Scholars and writers which provide a kind of first orientation for African philosophy. If this is so, it follows that there are no philosophers in traditional African thought. This appears to me to be a fallacy of composition.
3. **The Purist School:** This school is composed of such philosophers like Dr. C. S. Momoh (the founder), Dr. S. B. Oluwole, Professors J. O. Sodipo and Onyewuenyi, Dr. Barry Hallen, Dr. K. C. Anyawu and a host of others who embrace the ingenuity of African philosophy and a critical exposition and purification of any philosophical work in the direction of the moral, the metaphysical, the spiritual, the intuitive and

even the mystical. This school rests its claim on the premise that we can not afford to avoid, ignore or deny the mythological or mythical aspect of African philosophy without taking its context into consideration.<sup>6</sup>

Given the purist contention, there is no doubt that myth or mythology contextually or substantially, formally or informally provides some raw data for philosophy especially in the formal reconstruction of traditional or ancient and medieval philosophy. This appears to be the course that all known philosophy or philosophy of every race has hitherto passed through be it Greek philosophy, British philosophy, American philosophy, Russian philosophy or Italian philosophy. This is not to say that myth or mythology is in absolute term philosophy, neither is psychism, mysticism or spiritualism. Somewhere else,<sup>7</sup> I maintained that the philosophical relevance of myth or mythology can not be ignored in African philosophy. My argument in that paper is based on the premise that myth is philosophically relevant because it rationally expresses in pictorial and poetic form the philosophic and religious reality behind the nature of man and of things in African discourse. Moreso, myth metaphysically conveys and promotes the moral, religious, philosophical and socio-psychological truths which a plain prose can not explain with logical clarity.

In ancient Greek philosophy for instance, it is crystally difficult if not impossible to absolutely separate philosophy from myths. Plato, for example draws most of his philosophical inspirations and postulations from myths. Metaphysically, the Myth of Er in Platonic discourse serves as the basis and explanatory model for the account of the creation of the soul and body. In Timaeus, one of the popular dialogues of Plato, the source of the motion of life and Divine Craftsman who designed the cosmos and the immortal part of human soul was traced mythologically to Demiurge. Epistemologically, the Platonic Theory of Forms at the level of aphoria metamorphoses into myth. Mathematically, the Pythagorean theory of number is woven in myth. This conceptual illustration is clearly evident in the writing of Dr. S.B. Oluwola that:

*the Greek culture that produced Plato's idealism also gave us the mysticism of Pythagoras as well as the materialism of Democritus,. These opposing views are classified as Greek philosophy today simply because they ALL belong to the same (not metaphysical or epistemological school of thought) Greek literary tradition with its distinctive style, methodology and goal.<sup>8</sup>*

Besides, the imperceptible force, genes, molecules, electrons, neutrons,

UFOs which are useful scientific identities, concepts or symbols are by all scientific standards nothing but mythical. But given their respite and cognitive worth in modern day science it is daunting to dissuade their existential importance on the ground that they are imperceptible or mythical. Myth or mythology, religion, culture, tradition and custom are the rudimentary soils upon which philosophy is called upon to grow. And philosophy can not completely sever ties with them.

By and large, the mythical importance in philosophy lies originally with the generic claim that philosophy starts from wonders, awe, reverence or mystification. It is based on this that we recognize the role of philosophy as master scientist in the way it supervises, leads, nourishes, refines and develops other data and fragments into philosophic level. Momoh says it all when he writes that:

*philosophy nurtured mythology into metaphysics and epistemology, rhetoric into logic and analysis and religion into theology, morality and ethics. In fact it ... was philosophy that nurtured mythology as the encompasser of all knowledge.<sup>9</sup>*

Based on this it becomes unacceptable from the Logical neo-positivists in Africa that African philosophy is substandard because of its connection directly or indirectly with myth or mythology in some cases. African philosophy by all philosophical standards is critical, reflective, analytic, scientific and it is cognitively relevant to the existential, moral, cultural, political, ethical, religious, spiritual and aesthetic needs of the people. All that needs be done by the contemporary professional African philosophers is to mollify, internalize, purify, modernize and formalise the existing philosophical corpus in traditional African thought. Momoh gives a clue to this when he says:

*Patterns of reasoning, inferences and discourses in African philosophy can also be formalised and tested for formal validity or invalidity using the techniques of modern formal logic ... The logic issue in African philosophy therefore, is more of a challenge than a question. It is the challenge than a question. It is the challenge to African philosophers to develop a formal logic that will capture the spirit and metaphysics of African philosophy.<sup>10</sup>*

A further caution is that while using the techniques of modern formal logic to fortify African philosophy, style and methodology, African philosophers should not allow the Western intellectual traditions, concepts and doctrines to blind and bland them.

Along the same line of methodological division, Professor Odera as pointed out by Professor P.O. Bodunrin<sup>11</sup> identified four major schools viz:

1. **The school of Ethno-Philosophy:** Classified as ethno-philosophers in this school include among others, Professor Mbiti, Leopold Senghor, Fr. Alexis Kagame and Fr. Placide Tempels. Others include, Lucien Levy Bruhl, Janheiz Jahn, and many other missionary writers, colonial scholars and European anthropologists and theologians who formed the cream of the first writers on African philosophic tradition. This group of scholars is denounced by the African logical neo-positivists as philosophers on the ground that their approach to philosophy is anthropological, ethnographical, ethnological and theological. According to Professor M.A. Makinde the only purpose these scholars and their works serve lies in creating "the first Orientationists in African philosophy".<sup>13</sup>
2. **The School of Philosophic Sagacity:** This is the school of the likes of Professors Odera Oruka and Sodipo, Dr. Barry Hallen and Dr. K.C. Anyanwu. This school corresponds to those who Dr. C.S. Momoh says maintain a positive position on African philosophy. Their fundamental claim is that African philosophy is mythological, appreciatively and positively ... and that every philosophy or science is fundamentally mythology.<sup>14</sup>
3. **The School of Nationalistic or Ideological Philosophy:** This is the philosophy extolled by political theorists like Julius Nyerere, Kwame Nkrumah, Amilcar Cabral, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, and novelists like Chinua Achebe, Nobel Laureate Professor Wole Soyinka, etc.
4. **The School of Professional Philosophers:** The staunch advocates of this school include Professors P.O. Bodunrin, (the Champion),, Paulin Hountondji, J.E. Wiredu and partially Professor M.A. Makinde and Professor Robin Horton who seems to have decamped the school. Their main claim is that what goes under the banner of African philosophy is nothing more than mythology, cultural anthropology, religion and world views decked out for the occasion in the cloak of philosophical neo-positivism.

While rejecting the first three approaches as cheap philosophic options, Bodunrin, an advocate to African logical neo-positivist conception reclassified the enumerated schools into two global divisions.

*Two groups are discernible. On the one hand there are those I will call the traditionalists. These philosophers emphasize the present in relation to the past ... The second group are those who emphasize the present in relation to the future.*<sup>15</sup>

While the traditionalists correspond to the purist group of Dr. C.S. Momoh the second group, that is, the modernists is thus referred to as the 'African logical neo-positivists'.<sup>16</sup> This Momohian qualification is based on the premise that the arguments of philosophers in the modernists' group hinge on the veracity and rationality of the scientific paradigms advocated by the logical positivists of the Vienna circle of 1922. The position of the modernists, i.e. the African logical neo-positivists has always been that what the traditionalists profess as ancient African philosophy lacks analytic rigour and philosophic sagacity often found in the critical philosophy of the West.

Bodunrin for instance writes of the nationalist ideological philosophy that "political thinkers are also guilty of romanticizing the African past. Certainly, not everything about our past was glorious".<sup>17</sup> In a similar vein, Wiredu in his reaction against nationalistic ideological approach corroborates his fellow colleagues with the claim that African philosophy as distinct from African traditional world view is the philosophy that is produced by Contemporary African philosophers. It is still in the making.

It is indeed a correct observation by the African Logical neo-positivists that the first formal Orientation in African philosophy is mostly anthropological, theological, ethnological and ethnocentric. The truth of this is evident in Levy-Bruhl's characterisation of African thought system as 'pre-logical' and 'pre-scientific' even though he later renounced this negative idea of 'pre-logical mentality' in his *Posthumous Notebook* of 1975. Moreso, the conclusion of Reverend Fr. Placide Tempels on Bantu Philosophy as an embodiment of a collective thought of the primitive souls and Mbiti's submission that African philosophy is premised on religion rather than on a rational framework do not call for any philosophical celebration. But rather than dismissing the works and contributions of these scholars with a wave of hand and equally to guide against over generalization which ethno-philosophy can no longer maintain we can identify and sum up this trend as one of different philosophical traditions in African philosophical thought.

While we agree with Bodunrin that not everything about the past was necessarily glorious, critical and reflective it is not the case that all the political and literary thinkers are guilty of the glorification of the past. For instance, Chief Obafemi Awolowo holds a unique position in African philosophical labyrinth. He was noted for his philosophical postulates on issues like politics, state, reality, law, causality, dialectics, knowledge, man, human personality, human dynamism and freedom. Equally Professor Wiredu should note that ancient African philosophical thought does not

arise out of a vacuum. It has its own original source of its own. Professor Mbiti hits the point directly by the assertion that "some of the areas where they may be found are in the religion, proverbs, oral traditions, ethics and morals of the society concerned.<sup>19</sup> Apart from giving a testimony to the fact that traditional African thought does not grow on tree, Mbiti's view is contraindication of the African logical neo-positivists' view that philosophic sagacious approach is a cheap option. Contrarily, it is apparently clear that such approach is phenomenologically inevitable. As an approach, philosophic sagacity would bring to the fore the critical conceptions of African sages who are in a way equivalence of modern day academic philosophers on the fundamental issues of philosophical concern. Given the excavation of the thought of these sages it is up to Contemporary philosophers to literarily assemble, analyze and even critique the excavated ideas with a view to establishing a novel philosophy which will subsequently serve as a blue print for a modern philosophical thought to grow. This rehabilitative and phenomenological exercise of assembling, assessing, analysing and of critical judgement is philosophically inevitable since the greatest compliment you can pay a philosopher and any scholar for that matter is to criticize his work.<sup>20</sup> Naturally, it is a reaction and counter reaction to a thought process that usually forms the basis of another. This has always been the vicious circle of intellectual growth and the process taken by the Western philosophical system to be in vogue. If there had been no reaction to the Hesiodic and Homeric order in ancient Greece by the first Ionian thinkers, Ionian philosophy would not have emerged save a global Western philosophical system. Or rather, there would not have been ancient Greek philosophy if Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and others have carried out a full abandonment of the precursing cosmology in Greece,. According to Professor Gordon Hunnings:

*Plato did not confine himself to the devastation of Homeric religion...It must be supposed that Plato only attacked traditional culture, he attempted to preserve what was best in it. The educational theories of the Republic which dominate the world for 1500 years represent the life styles, value systems and social form of what Plato thought to be best in Greek societies.<sup>21</sup>*

If the ancient Greek philosophers who are the known founding fathers found it extremely and inevitably difficult to dispense from the precursing cosmology it would rather be unfair and pedantic for the African philosophers - especially the skeptics to declare the African past as grossly illogical, unanalytical and unphilosophical. The history of mankind is one of mutual

connections. For a unique African philosophy, "African philosophy", argues Ruch, "must consider history and its traditions as the soil upon which it is called upon to grow".<sup>22</sup> However, African philosophers of the contemporary period can not afford to alienate themselves from the African past if they were to forge an authentic African philosophy. African past by nature is an embodiment of several philosophical issues of God, time, space, substance, Being, person, matter, reality, freedom and determinism. All races by nature are intellectually endowed with curious instincts, rationality and intelligence to grasp with fundamental philosophical zeal and the intricacy of their environment. In the words of Momoh:

*In traditional and ancient African societies, there were generally medicine men, priests, rulers, military leaders and sagacious elders whose position in the group corresponds roughly to the position occupied by the scholars and thinkers in modern societies...*<sup>23</sup>

There is no doubt that the philosophic sagacity demonstrated by these curiously minded traditional African sages is now scattered over the various branches of philosophy as studied today. On the contrary, the African Logical neo-positivists, that is, the universalists may not share this position. To this group of academic teachers of philosophy the label 'British Philosophy', "American Philosophy", "Greek Philosophy", 'Chinese Philosophy' and Western Philosophy on the whole are not arbitrary or philosophically continental. African philosophy, on the other hand, to them is not only partial, arbitrary, derogatory but continentally and philosophically pejorative and mythological. It is for this reason that Professor Oruka talks of "African specific issues", Wiredu talks of 'African Orientation in philosophy', Horton extols "philosophy of African traditional thought" and Bodunrin advocates 'issues in African philosophy'.<sup>24</sup> Paulin Hountondji<sup>25</sup> appears to have blended the holistic approach of the universalist thinkers with the formulation that for a piece of work to qualify as African philosophy "it should be a set of texts specifically written by Africans and described by their authors as philosophy. If this is so, it follows logically that in Western philosophy such as Thales', Socratic and Aristotle's thoughts would not qualify as philosophy since they did not by themselves document their philosophical postulations. Moreso, many of philosophical seminars, debates and conferences would not authentically count as philosophy since they are in most cases in the form of oral discussions and fragments.

In addition, since the philosophical African traditional thought lacks literate foundation, it becomes or graduates into what Oruka calls 'unique-

debased philosophy'. This skepticism nurtured by the skeptic African Logical neo-positivists is nothing but an aberration of philosophic genuineness. Beside this, Hontondji's formulation displaces philosophy and moves away from standards when he states that the author of the piece should be able to label it philosophical. Hence, it is easy and cheap to parade or manifest the works of historians, anthropologists, theologians, et al, as philosophical if the authors so decide to label them as such without any regard to philosophical standards and dispositions. By and large, any criterion or formulation is bound to be fraught with one problem or the other. Professor Makinde talks like the purist when he states that there may be no answer to that appellation until African philosophy is written and taught in an African language. This, I think, amounts to saying that there will be no authentic African literature, African history, African art, et al, until they are all written and taught in our national indigenous language.

On the whole, it is parochial and kaleidoscopic to shy away the label 'African philosophy' if a similar label is not disgusting, discriminatory and continental and does not defeat the universality of philosophy in Western philosophy. The position of the African Logical neo-positivist which attempts to uglyify and clamp down African philosophy is purely unAfrican for reason that it alienates itself from the cultural foundations of African set up. Accordingly, Momoh disagrees with the skeptics on the premise that:

*If we accept the position of the Logical neo-positivist we will find that African philosophy will be a cacophony of philosophies - empiricism, linguistic analysis, symbolic logic, pragmatism, marxism, rationalism and existentialism...*<sup>26</sup>

We should not overglorify and romanticize occidental as well as oriental philosophies to the detriment of African philosophy. The purpose of philosophy lies in making it relevant to the immediate society. It is time to disengage from the abstruse nature of philosophy and make philosophy applicable to the immediate society. So many philosophical postulations in history have collapsed because of their alien posture to the tradition in which they found themselves. Idealism collapsed in Britain because of its alien posture to the British philosophic tradition. Logical positivist's demise in America towards the end of the twentieth century was due to its failure to accommodate critical philosophy. Marxism, in the same vein collapsed in the Eastern bloc because of its stereotyped doctrinal application and failure to imbibe the revolutionary dictation of the contemporary world view.

On this note, it must be noted that the African past is not as essentially proverbial, parabolical, pedantic, spiritualistic and supra-sensible as we have been made to believe by the African Logical neo-positivists. For

instance, proverbs, says Momoh, are helpful only as a telescope with which to view the metaphysics and morality of ancient African philosophy as far as its communal aspect goes.<sup>27</sup> In addition, they are the poetry and moral science of the Africans. So, we can not afford to ignore their philosophic importance in African philosophical setting. Besides, the claim of the African Logical neo-positivists can not hold on the ground that it is not true that you need to be literate before you can philosophize because literacy is not in any way synonymous with knowledge. Similarly put, wisdom and knowledge should be distinguished. Knowledge is not wisdom. If it is, a literate son would not have spoken to his illiterate father in English language knowing fully that he would not understand him.<sup>28</sup>

In short, knowledge and wisdom do not belong to the same fore. though we agree that with literacy, western man has made giant strides in the grasp and acquisition of knowledge of the physical universe. Nevertheless, there are some things the African sages know that Socrates, Plato, Aristotle... were ignorant of even though that does not make them wiser than they. However, the modern intellectual knowledge of science, technology, literature and politics could not claim superiority over the wisdom of African sages. A western man with all his intellectual know-how needs be reminded that to know facts is not enough. A wise man of African traditional experience knows more than facts. He is by nature and in mind sagaciously wise, brilliant and philosophically original, informed and curious though he is unlettered. In short the wisdom of traditional Africans save the contemporary academic teachers of philosophy is wider than intellectual know-how but it is not in dispute that both have the propensity of offering a greater insight and understanding to the ultimate principles of life.

#### **IV. THE ISSUE OF THE SUBJECT MATTER**

The issue of the subject matter is one of the controversial aspects of philosophy in general and African philosophy in particular. While the protagonists see a linkage between several aspects of philosophy and cultural tradition in Africa the antagonists, that is, the skeptical African Logical neo-positivists maintain a radial departure from the African traditional setting. To the skeptics, philosophy is essentially of rationality, intelligence, curiosities and vigour all of which are lacking in the African traditional thinking. And, you can only locate these philosophical attributes in the works of the literate professional philosophers but not in the sages. They seem to have forgotten the caution given by Dr. C. S. Momoh that any philosophical work in the direction of the moral, the metaphysical, the spiritual, the intuitive or even the mystical is within the tradition of Ancient

African philosophy both in its communal and private aspects.<sup>29</sup> Historically speaking, the controversy over the subject matter of philosophy is as old as philosophy. What counts as philosophy indeed varies from school to school and tradition to tradition. For instance, the subject matter of philosophy in the history of mankind is as diverse as the variously known schools thought. The thalesian, pythagorean, atomist, sophist, socratic, platonian and the aristotelian schools of the ancient Greek philosophy are not known to have held a unified philosophical system. The subject matter of philosophy equally varies from the ancient through medieval, modern to contemporary philosophic traditions. In modern philosophic tradition, there were so many existing philosophic schools such as the master scientist or metaphysical school of Descartes, Leibniz and Spinoza; underlabourer school of Locke, Newton, Boyle and Sydenham. In the contemporary philosophic tradition are the logical positivist school, Thomas Kuhn historical method and Marxist materialistic approach. The subject of philosophic discourse among these schools is informed by the perplexed and controversial nature of philosophy.

Given this philosophical feature, one expects a controversy over what is to pass for African philosophy especially between the purists and the skeptics. I have already made some comments on the skeptics i.e. the African logical neo-positivists. In addition, we understand that the skeptic's position is overzealously being masterminded by the foreign as well as the scientific paradigms of the empirical verification of the logical positivist school. But we are all living witnesses of the down trodden fate of logical positivism today. Its principal advocates such as Wittgenstein, Ayer and Strawson later abandoned the school to embrace a more critical philosophy. Realising the futility of domesticating the Western philosophy especially the Anglo-Saxon analytic tradition, the skeptics have now started to back pedal from the initial skepticism to embrace a more realistic and feasible approach to African philosophy. This attempt is symbolic in Professor Bodunrin declaration that "no one says the past must be ignored".<sup>30</sup>

In a nutshell, the dispute over African philosophy in particular and philosophy in general is fundamentally captured by the summation that:

*Philosophy consists essentially in contemplation, critical reasoning, analysis, deliberate or spontaneous rational attempt to modify, restructure, reorganize or even change an existing corpus of knowledge or formulate a novel one.*<sup>31</sup>

Hence, what constitutes the base of African philosophy is the view of the

traditional sagacious and philosophic thinkers in African past as well as the works of the professionally skilled contemporary philosophers. The unlettered historical source of African source philosophy we can not afford to deny in the name of oriental philosophy. To deny this fact is to accept erroneously that African philosophy is like a tree without a trunk or a plant without a root.

#### V. CONCLUSION

The nature of philosophy is contemplative. The modern African philosophers need to bear certain fundamental points in mind in constructing a novel philosophy for Africa. African philosophers need to realise the impossibility and danger of maintaining a clean break from the traditional African thought. It must be realised that it is in the traditional thought of the people that lay their philosophic postulations in metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, logic, aesthetics, philosophical psychology and the fundamental presuppositions of life. The purist school of thought will say, Africa in its indigenous settings, hosted a culture, civilization, learning, philosophy, science, medicine, and societal and political organizations which are superior to those of other nations at comparative epochs.<sup>32</sup> But to separate the philosophical thought from the non-philosophical, the existing philosophical tools such as rationality, reflection, rigour and systematic analysis must come in. Western experience must not be allowed to overshadow the African root of African philosophy. We must also de-emphasize the cognition of African philosophic realities through the Western intellectual quagmire.

According to Karl Marx, philosophers have only interpreted the world, the point is to change it.<sup>33</sup> This is why African philosophers need to make philosophy applicable, adaptable and functionally relevant to the society. This could only be achievable by philosophical study of various concepts that are uniquely African. Such study would need to include a critical study of such topical issues like God's existence, space, time, human nature. The modern philosophers can not afford to forge an African philosophy without delving into African past with a view to retaining the positive and dropping the unphilosophical materials. This is a way to building a stronger future.<sup>34</sup> Professor Sogolo emphasizes this point with the claim that "no discipline can sever ties with its past since it is the past that gives inspiration to the present while the present is expected to serve as a stimulant for the future. This is further corroborated by Dr. C. S. Momoh with the stipulation that "the past has to be examined in a new light not really for ideological purposes, even though this reason in itself is

weighty enough, but for the purposes of academic and scholarly honesty - to set records and facts straight and right."<sup>35</sup>

Whether we call it metaphysics, replacement of analysis or the drawing of programmatic assertion, philosophy involves synthesis and reconstruction. This transforms and interacts with traditional culture forming a synthesis that becomes the traditional culture of the next generations.<sup>36</sup> The challenge is tasking. But it is indeed encouragingly palpable and applaudable to see professional African philosophers using the existing philosophical weapons to formulating a new philosophical tradition for Africa. New books and journals<sup>37</sup> on African philosophy are springing up. Several methodological approaches on various perceptions on African philosophy are emerging. Evolving from these approaches are new idea, theories and formulations.<sup>38</sup> All these developments coupled with the intensification of African philosophic studies in African universities collaborate the effort towards the formulation of a formidable African philosophic tradition.

By and large, it will indeed place the African philosophers on the academic world map if we could intensify our research methodology and evolve a formal logic by intellectual intuition that will revolutionize the existing philosophical corpus. The fact that the western philosophic tradition, writes Dr. Bewaji, has become pervasive in this and many other parts of the world is accidental, not a product of there being no alternative.<sup>39</sup>

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## **Foundationalism Coherentism: Two Misconceptions of Knowledge and its Justification**

By

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### **Introduction**

One of the fundamental definitional attributes of knowledge is "justification". This feature of knowledge is, in fact, the most prominent feature of all the definitional attributes of knowledge. The prominence of justification as a definitional condition of knowledge is clearly manifested in the history of this notion in philosophical discourses. This is perhaps responsible for the assertions of John Ketes that epistemology is more of a theory of justification than a theory of knowledge. The importance of justification as a definitional feature of knowledge is due to the role it plays in the demarcation of knowledge from mere belief. It is justification that separates true knowledge from mere guesses.

Traditionally, two theories of justification dominate epistemology namely foundationalism and coherentism. Foundationalism as a theory of justification holds that any knowledge claim, for it to be justified, needs to be traced to some set of basic beliefs which are themselves selfjustifying, apodictic and incorrigible. The position of coherentism, on the other hand, is that for any epistemic claims to be justified it must be consistent and coherent with the belief system from which it emanates.

Contemporary epistemology has witnessed various objections to these two theories of justification. This present paper is in the same spirit; the position we want to discuss in detail here is that both theories which appear conflicting, rest on the same misconceived notion of knowledge. The failure of the two as adequate theories of justification we shall argue is traceable to their assumption that the knowledge that needs justification is not a particular epistemic claim but rather the sum total of all our epistemic claims.

### **Foundationalism and the basic beliefs**

As we said in the introduction to this essay, foundationalism is the theory of justification that believes that a belief is justified if it is derived from some basic beliefs called foundations. It points out that some beliefs are self-evidently justified, absolutely incorrigible and therefore needs no

justification. Such beliefs are referred to as the basic belief or the foundational beliefs. The advocates of this theory of justification will argue that for any other belief that does not belong to the set of basic beliefs to be justified they must be connected to those beliefs inferentially. All justified beliefs according to them, are either self-evident beliefs.<sup>2</sup>

The position of foundationalism as a theory of justification can be illustrated with this example. If the belief that, all tomatoes that are ripe are red in colour is to be justified, its justification must rest on the basic belief that any claim from experience is a true and justified claim. From the second that is incorrigible and self-evident we can justify the first claim that is not self-evident. To the foundationalists a particular knowledge claims can only be justified on the basis of its relationship with a basic belief.

What the foundationalists are saying in essence is that if you have five epistemic claims, like the following:

- (A) I know that the tomato is red
- (B) I know that my father is light in complexion
- (C) I know that all Nigerians are of the negroid race
- (D) I know that the sun rises from the East
- (E) I know that a bachelor is not married

Such claims can only be justified if they are derived from some basic beliefs. For example if these claims are all derived from experience and there is a basic belief that is incorrigible and self-evident which says, "any knowledge from experience is justifiable", in the light of the incorrigible basic belief all the other beliefs are therefore justified.

Historically, foundationalism like many other theories in epistemology originated out of the desire to challenge skepticism and fallibilism. The foundationalists want to show that the incorrigible basic beliefs will negate the position of the skeptics that absolutely certain knowledge is not possible. The question that the foundationalists are faced with is this; if we say that absolutely certain knowledge is possible how do we arrive at this so-called certain knowledge? This question was posed by the skeptics and the bid to answer it generated a problem in foundationalism called "the problem of infinite regression of justification."

The problems of infinite regression of justification can be explained thus; if you say that a particular claim is justified, from what criterion do we arrive at the justification? in essence, there is the need for us to justify the criterion of the earlier justification. The problem is; how do we justify

our justifications of other beliefs? If any epistemic claims need justification by a criterion, how do we justify the criterion itself? The answer to this question, according to the foundationalists, is that there can be some beliefs which need no justification for they are self-justifying. Those beliefs are therefore going to terminate the infinite regression of justification. Those basic beliefs will be responsible for the justification of other beliefs.

From the above explanation of the position of foundationalism as a theory of knowledge we can infer that there are two categories of beliefs; those that are self-evident and therefore need no external justification and those that are not self-evident beliefs. We can also infer that there is a linear, inferential and hierarchical relationship between the former and the latter, with the latter being dependent on the former.

This linear, inferential and hierarchical conception of epistemic arrangement is behind the architectural model that is popular among the foundationalists. In the light of the inferential relationship, the foundationalist conceive of epistemic claims in the light of a superstructure with the basic <sup>base</sup> as the foundation, while other beliefs represent the remaining edifice. They believe in the true spirit of their metaphor, that the existence of the other beliefs depends on the strength of the basic beliefs, just as the existence of an edifice depends on its foundation. In the light of the above metaphor many adherents of foundationalism strive to defend the basic beliefs as being strong and capable of the task of supporting other beliefs.

But foundationalism as a theory of justification has not been adequately established. Its history is full of arguments and counter-arguments between the proponents of this theory and their opponents. The failure of foundationalism as a theory of justification is due to the inability of this theory to be able to defend some of its basic positions.

One problematic aspect of foundationalism concerns the issue of the self-justification, incorrigibility and apodicy of the basic beliefs. It has been consistently proved that those qualities given to the basic beliefs by the foundationalists cannot be defended. How is it possible for the basic beliefs to attain those superlative qualities? Can we ever talk of incorrigible and self-evident beliefs in a fallible world with fallible mortals in control?

The foundationalists are also criticised on the basis of their solution to the problem of infinite regression. It is said that the termination of the infinite regression at the basic beliefs is arbitrary. It is either that the regression continues ad-infinitum or the termination or it should be adequately explained. Such an explanation it is believed is lacking in the

position of the foundationalists.

Another set of objections raised against foundationalism concerns the assumption that beliefs are inferentially related and in a hierarchical order like a superstructure. It is objected that the nature of epistemic claims, that is, their relationship to one another does not warrant a belief in the metaphor of a superstructure. Knowledge in its natural setting, it is posited, is not "developed in a constructive manner which can make us think of a linear or hierarchical order of epistemic claims."<sup>3</sup>

The last set of objections relates to the issues of whether basic beliefs are capable of serving as the justification point for the beliefs. What Jonathan Dancy said of the empirical aspect of foundationalism is true of all the other variants of this theory of justification. Dancy said that how is it possible for all our beliefs about the past, the present and the future to be justified by these basic beliefs about sensory states?<sup>4</sup> This objection is similar in respect to the one we seek to raise in this essay. The objection that is cardinal here relates to the issues of whether it is proper and natural to have a One-dimensional approach to the justification of all the diverse epistemic claims that can be made. But before that question is raised let us examine coherentism and see the similarity of assumption in the two theories of justification.

#### **Coherentism: Justification Within the System**

Coherentism is the traditional alternative to foundationalism on the question of epistemic justification. The position of coherentism is that all beliefs are systematically related and linked and their justification should reflect this. The justification of any epistemic claim depends therefore on its consistency and coherency to other beliefs within the system with the belief in question. Coherentism has a holistic and circular conception knowledge unlike foundationalism which conceives knowledge in a linear order. Coherentism is an offshoot of the coherence theory of truth. The coherence theory of truth says that for anything to be true "it must not conflict with itself and there must be no suggestion which failed to fall inside it. Perfect truth must realize the idea of systematic whole."<sup>5</sup>

From the above it can be derived that the coherentist theory of knowledge and justification assume that beliefs are always arrived at within a given system, and their justification therefore depends on the conformity of those beliefs to the system to which they belong. For example, let us consider the five epistemic claims we examined earlier with foundationalism:

- (A) I know that tomato is red
- (B) I know that my father is light incomplexion
- (C) I know that all Nigerians are of the negroid race
- (D) I know that the sun rises from the East
- (E) I know that a bachelor is not married.

To the coherentists we can only talk of justification of these epistemic claims if we put them in the correct system to which they belong. If in our example all the five epistemic claims fall into one system let us call it an empirical system of beliefs, the justification of one of the claims depends on its coherency and consistency with the empirical system. If we examine the epistemic claims "D" that says; I know that sun rises from the East, if we find it to be inconsistent with other beliefs in the empirical system, the sun rises from West ~~the~~ rather than from the East, we can reject this claim and posit that it is not justified because it fails to cohere with system to which it belongs.

The coherentists have argued that their theory of justification is a better alternative to foundationalism. It is a better alternative because it avoids all the loopholes of foundationism. For instance, they argue that it does not lead us to the dilemma of infinite regression for there is no need for a stop at a basic truth since the justification is effected by the entire system and not by some unique basic beliefs. The regress of justification, according to this position, will not go on forever, nor does it need to stop at a particular truth. It rather circles back upon itself and thus forms closed system.<sup>6</sup>

The coherentists also posit that their theory is better than foundationalism because it is democratic in orientation while the latter is autocratic. What they mean is that there is equality within the circle of coherentist justification while there is superiority of basic beliefs in foundationism owing to the hierarchical nature of the theory. The difference between coherentism and its traditional alternative foundationalism is explained thus:

*For the coherentist knowledge is not a Baconian brickwall with block supporting block upon a solid foundation, rather an item of knowledge is like a mode of knowledge is like a mode of spider's web which is linked to others by thin strand of connection each along weak but altogether adequate for its support<sup>7</sup>*

From the above exposition we can see that the coherentists tend to believe that their theory is an adequate alternative to foundationalism. But a close look at the literature on justification will show that coherentism is

also not an acceptable theory of justification. The fundamental objection raised against this theory concerns its permissive nature. It has been argued that the criterion of justification supplied by the criterion of justification supplied by the coherentists will justify virtually all knowledge claims without exception. Any epistemic claim can pass the coherentists' test, and even the obviously invalid claims can become justified simply by being consistent with the system.

Our opposition to the two theories of justification foundationalism and coherentism is directed not at the positions of the two but rather at the basic assumption behind the two theories. The two theories though apparently opposed, agree on their basic assumption. They agree on their assumption of what knowledge is, its true nature and the way it should be justified. The two, erroneously therefore seek to attain grandiose and total system of justification. This essay, as we shall see in the next section, is opposed to this because the nature of knowledge in question does not warrant the absolute systematic and grandiose approach of both foundationalism and coherentism.

### **On the Misconceived Notion of Knowledge**

The fundamental position we want to hold in this present essay is that the two theories of justification fail as adequate theories of justification because they have a misconceived notion of the issue at stake. The misconception of the issue of justification throughout the history of philosophy is responsible for the futile exercise embarked upon by both foundationalism and coherentism.

Fundamentally, the mistake of both theories of justification is due to the confusion of the two questions that can be asked in relation to epistemic justification.

The two questions are:

- (A) How can I justify any particular epistemic claim that is made?
- (B) How can we justify all epistemic claims?

We can see that Question "A" is a legitimate question while Question "B" is a pseudo question. The former is legitimate and genuine because it is asking a realistic question while the latter is a pseudo question because it is not a realistic question but rather an authoritarian one.

The two theories of justification foundationalism and coherentism fail because they are reactions to the pseudo question, that is question B. The

pseudo question is asking how we can justify all epistemic claims, the justification for all beliefs that can ever be possessed. The question is therefore an illegitimate question because it does not have a clear understanding of what epistemic claims are. Epistemic claims by their true nature are diverse with each claim unique, different and independent of others. Question "B" erroneously assumes that epistemic claims are inter-related and therefore their justification should reflect this.

The crux of our argument in this paper is that both foundationalism and coherentism fail as theories of justification because they misconceive knowledge. Knowledge in its natural setting is a unique enterprise. Knowledge by its very nature is the knowledge of something. Knowledge is not also a static phenomenon but rather dynamic. Man is a developing and dynamic being and his knowledge is also developing and dynamic.

Paul Feyerband in his controversial book Against Method describes knowledge thus:

*Knowledge is not a series of self-consistent theories that converges towards an ideal view, it is not gradual approach to the truth. It is rather an ever increasing ocean of mutually incompatible and even incommensurable alternatives, each single theory, each fairytale, each myth that is part of the collection forcing the others into great articulation and all of them contributing via this process of the development of consciousness.<sup>8</sup>*

This description of knowledge might sound polemic and pedantic but it supports our position that knowledge is not a phenomenon that can be conceived in an arranged and static manner.

The failure of the two theories also can be explained in the light of their confusion of the two senses of the word knowledge. The word knowledge in ordinary discourse is used in two senses. There is the first sense of the word knowledge as referring to a particular epistemic claim for example when we say that we know that tomato is red. There is another sense of the word knowledge as a body of justified beliefs that an individual or a community might have, for example, "Newtons knowledge of science" or "the knowledge of mankind about the space." If we consider the two questions examined earlier we shall see that Question "A" which is a genuine question conceives knowledge in the particular sense while Question "B" which is a pseudo question conceives knowledge in the second sense.

When you ask: How can all our beliefs in the past, present and future

be justified? Are you asking a legitimate question? Is the question not too absolute? When you ask: How can all the divergent beliefs that the various men in the universe can possess, be justified? What is the system by which all the manifold epistemic claims that we have now or in the future be assessed? When you ask such questions and you expect straight forward and final answers should you ever be taken serious? That is exactly the right approach to the problem of justification in the traditional setting. The traditional philosophers instead of jettisoning those pseudo questions wanted to solve them and the result is what we have in foundationalism and coherentism. Those absolute and pseudo questions that we saw earlier should be rejected for they will always generate pseudo theories.

C. Benjamin rightly said in his articles "The Problem of knowledge" that most problems of philosophy can only be solved if they are accurately and precisely formed.<sup>9</sup> The problem of justification in traditional epistemology has defied solution because it is not properly formed. The questions that we asked above need to be formed. Attempting to solve illegitimate questions in philosophy is a common sight. In actual fact the first question raised at the genesis of philosophy, that is, the question; what is the primary substance of the world? is an illegitimate question. Questions like this and those questions we examined earlier on should be reformulated in order to finally solve the genuine problems.

Those pseudo problems which permeate the entire history of philosophy originated out of the mistakes of the past. According to Hutten in his book, **The Origin of Science: An Enquiry into the foundation of Western Thought**,<sup>10</sup> most of the traditional problems of philosophy are products of an old attitude that will sound absurd in the present age.<sup>11</sup> Those problems according to him are product of what he called "epimophilia", the tendency to seek to know everything at the same time.<sup>12</sup> According to Hutten it was the mystico-religious spirit of the time that could tolerate this tendency to seek to know everything at the same time.<sup>13</sup> The present age should therefore not tolerate this mystico-religious spirit. We should therefore reformulate all the problems formulated by the outdated tendency. One of such problems is the problem of justification.

It was also this age-long spirit of "epimophiloia" that generated an aspect of the traditional theories of justification, that is, its opposition to skepticism and fallibilism. It is known that throughout their history both foundationalism and coherentism strive to defeat both skepticism and fallibilism with the impression that man is capable of absolute knowledge. This spirit is borne out of mystico-religious origin of traditional philosophy.

Taking a new look at the issue of knowledge and its justification will show that a little bit of skepticism and fallibilism is needed. The true situation is that human knowledge can be fallible since man is himself a fallible being.

In the light of this, I believe that a theory of justification developed by David Annis tagged "contextualism" satisfies all the above requirements of a legitimate theory of justification. This theory of justification was developed by Annis in his article "Contextualists Theory of Epistemic Justification",<sup>14</sup> but the tenets of this theory have been implicit in the works of earlier writers particularly Karl Popper<sup>15</sup> and the pragmatists.<sup>16</sup> Contextualism has a proper understanding of the problem of justification and does not confuse the two senses of the word knowledge. It understands that the genuine problem of justification is the justification of particular epistemic claims rather than the justification of all epistemic in its human and social perspective and they strive to justify epistemic claims in the light of the situations and contexts that generated them.

Contextualism, David Annis argued, believes that knowledge is made within social and individual contexts and any justification of it should respect those contextual parameters.<sup>17</sup> The theory, Annis argued, takes into consideration the contextual origin of any epistemic claims in order to justify it.<sup>18</sup> David Annis defended contextualist theory of justification in this manner:

*When asking whether "S" is justified in believing "H" this has to be considered relative to an issue context. Suppose we are interested in whether Jones an ordinary non-medically trained person has the general information that polio is caused by a virus. If this response to our question is that he remembers the paper reporting that Salk said it was, then this is good enough. He has performed adequately given the issue context. But suppose the context is an examination for the M.D. degree. Here we expect a lot more if the candidate simply said what Jones did, we would take him as being very deficient in knowledge. Thus relative to issue-context a person may be justified in believing 'h' but not justified relative to another context.*<sup>19</sup>

From the above we can see that contextualism as a theory of justifications of epistemic claims are not absolute but relative depending on situations. From the above example we can see that a person might present a weak justification for a belief whereas he might need a stronger justification in another context. Contextualism therefore is a reaction to the legitimate question of justification, that is, the question; how can I justify a particular

*W.S.H.*

epistemic claim that I have? We can see that the theory does not see justification as a sophisticated, complex and absolute matter but rather as a simple, relative and tentative affair.

There is an obvious objection that can be raised against contextualism or any theory that reacts to the genuine problem of justification. It is an objection concerning the relativism of the theory. Critics might oppose the relativism of contextualism. We can at this juncture posit that the conflict between relativism and absolutism in traditional philosophy is not the issue here, but it is rather that knowledge by its proper nature is relative and situational. The object and subject of knowledge, by their nature are relative to situations. It is therefore proper that the justification of knowledge should reflect this.

Again, we need to react to the criticism that can be raised by some zealous epistemologists that contextualism will allow skepticism and fallibilism to thrive. They might argue that the battle between the traditional epistemologists and the skeptics will be easily won by the latter if we give room for a theory of justification that is relative and simple. Our answer is that a genuine theory of justification need not get itself involved in an unnecessary scuffle between the traditional epistemologists and the skeptics, for their two positions are in the extreme and therefore wrong. In fact, a genuine theory of knowledge should acknowledge that man is fallible since he is mortal. This should inform it not to regard any epistemic claim as being incorrigible. This is why the proper theory of justification will be prepared to jettison an epistemic claim that cannot be justified instead of defending it against all odds. The position of any genuine theory of justification is between extreme skepticism and traditional theories of justification, it is that knowledge is neither absolutely certain nor absolutely impossible.

### Conclusion

Contemporary epistemologists have been troubled by the chequered history of the two traditional theories of justification, particularly by the inherent flaws of the more popular of the two theories, foundationalism. There have been many reactions to this problems. W.V.O. Quine on his part argues that epistemology needs re-examination.<sup>20</sup> His own re-examination is in the form of naturalised epistemology. Quine's main thesis is that to avoid the pitfalls of foundationalism knowledge must be studied in its natural setting.<sup>21</sup> This position as we know is similar to our argument in this essay.

Apart from Quine's "naturalised epistemology" some contemporary philosophers have called for a total uprooting of epistemology as a foundational discipline. This "epistemology crucified" is mainly championed by Richard Rorty who in his famous book "Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature"<sup>22</sup> argues against foundationalism and calls for philosophy in general and epistemology in particular to close shop since they can no more lay claim to being a proper critique of culture. On the question of justification of beliefs Rorty's stand is like ours in this paper, his position is pragmatic and contextual. To him the quest for foundations is unnecessary since justification of knowledge depends on the consensus of a particular epistemic community.<sup>23</sup>

Although we are not accepting Rorty's claim that an end should be put to epistemology, we agree with him that knowledge and its justification should reflect the contextual and tentative nature of human beliefs. This position is our alternative to the two rejected theories of justification. Our stand is that both theories misconceive knowledge and future epistemology should strive to avoid this misconception. The genuine theory of justification should be simple, situational and dynamic. A belief should be justified simply by showing how it is arrived at in its original situation. If any skeptic should demand for something more rigorous, then we should heed the advice of Rorty by telling him to get lost. We should be bold enough to tell him that the belief in question belongs to a human being and not to a divine being.

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16. The Pragmatists like C.S. Pierce, William James and John Dewey can be said to be predecessors of David Annis theory of contextualism because of their dynamic approach to the issues of justification.
17. David Annis, **op. cit.**, p. 213.
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20. W.V.O. Quine, "Epistemology Naturalised" in **Ontological Relativity** (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969).
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## NEW - THOMISTIC CONCEPTION OF NATURAL LAW

By

*D. I. ANELE*

### Introduction

This essay is an attempt to succinctly and critically examine the neo-Thomistic conception of natural law. My strategy shall be, first, to give a brief analysis of the meaning of natural law. Second, I shall give a short exposition of natural law doctrine by St. Thomas Aquinas. Afterwards, I shall dwell upon the history and general thesis of neo-Thomism. This shall be followed by the elucidation of neo-Thomistic doctrine of natural law, using Thomas E. Davitt's version of it as a pivot. I shall thereafter evaluate the neo-Thomistic doctrine of natural law. I do hope that at the end of our intellectual journey we shall arrive at the bus-stop with a clearer knowledge of the neo-Thomistic conception of natural law.

### WHAT IS NATURAL LAW?

In its broadest sense the word "nature" can mean "the totality of things." It can also refer to the laws and principles of structure by which the behaviour of things may be explained. However, the question "What is natural?" can be exhibited most clearly by another question: "What is natural" contrasted with in this context?

Here we can contrast "natural" with "artificial" or "conventional" and say that something is natural if it is not man-made. We can also hold that "natural" denotes the causal factors that are peculiar to that type of thing or organism in nature which actually makes it the kind of thing that it is. As regards man proper, we can take any of two divergent positions towards the concept "nature." At one extreme we can look upon "nature" as "an ideal expressing the fundamental aspirations of man if his full potentialities are to be attained."<sup>2</sup> In this view nature is conceived normatively as providing an ideal standard against which the non-natural or the purely conventional may be evaluated. At the other extreme, nature may be regarded descriptively as simply the way man behaves as a result of being human, that is, as a result of his psycho-physical make up. Although this conception is descriptive, it could be normatively interpreted because, in looking at the way man actually behaves some standard will inevitably have to be applied

in order to judge what is natural and what is non-natural to man. We shall see that the Thomists, or rather the neo-Thomists, adopt this approach in their conception of natural law.

The concept of law can also be similarly analysed. Descriptively it relates to the regularities of occurrence of phenomena in experience. This constitutes the special province of the natural sciences. It can denote, normatively, the ideals of behaviour people ought to and are expected to follow as members of a society.

The meaning of natural law has oscillated between these two meanings.<sup>3</sup> In the premodern period, natural law was, by and large, the conviction or belief that there is a supra-legal element which constitutes the foundation and end of law and this element is the touchstone for measuring all things legal. There is also the conception of natural law within the modern context. This is that there is a constitutional or societal element which should assume primacy over all other constitutional provisions and it is the measuring rod for the success or failure of the policies of government. These two conceptions of natural law can be collapsed yielding a formal generalisation to the effect that natural law is the conviction in the existence of an element which informs or ought to inform and guide the legal system or even the entire societal system.<sup>4</sup>

### ST. THOMAS AQUINAS ON NATURAL LAW

St. Thomas Aquinas situated his natural law doctrine within the context of Aristotelian teleological metaphysics and Christian theology. He defined laws generally as "nothing else than an ordinance of reason for the common good, made by him who has the care of the community, and promulgated."<sup>5</sup> He has a teleological conception of law. Law is a means to certain ends. Experience teaches us that the achievement of an objective depends on acting appropriately in certain ways. This is because there is a definite relation between a given operation and its result in the nature of things. Natural phenomena evince certain inevitable regularities and consequences; thus fire burns, it does freeze. Thus one chooses to act in a particular way because of its properties. Also, there is a natural tendency inherent in things to develop in certain ways. So, for instance, an acorn is destined to grow into an oak; it will never be an orange tree or a mango tree. At any rate, the appreciation of the relation between means and ends and the process of growth towards fulfillment is only accessible to beings dowered with reason and intelligence. Man can think but the acorn cannot. It is man that appreciates. He also can choose ends he wishes and the means of achieving them, within certain limits.

A legislator, Aquinas believes, can choose means and ends in the society, ends and means which those who are required to conform to his directions can also appreciate by the exercise of their reasoning faculty. As a corollary, where the achievement of the end which the legislator seeks depends on the adherence by others to patterns of conduct he prescribes, it is necessary that these should be promulgated.

Aquinas holds that although Man is largely the architect of his destiny, he is also subject to certain basic impulses perceivable by observing human nature.<sup>6</sup> At the lowest level, the level which man shares with other things in the world, is the impulse towards self-preservation; at the next level these are the impulses, shared with other creatures, to reproduce the species and rear children; at the apex there is the impulse to improve, to make rational decisions. Thus the last is peculiar to man because of his rationality. These basic impulses are teleological and point to a definite direction; they are seen to be means of achieving not only survival and existence but perfection also. They are an inescapable aspect of human nature and show that man is naturally limited.

Aquinas goes on to argue that if the machinery of human nature is itself a means to an end, the establishment of the end and the means for its achievement could only have originated in the reason of some super human legislator; but man, by virtue of his reason, can also comprehend it. In this way we have the eternal law which is promulgated to man through natural law, operating at each of its levels, through reason. Aquinas says that there is no need of promulgation to other creatures, for they lack the intelligence of man. Although reason is needed for the appreciation of the order in nature, this does not necessarily imply that reason established them; nor does the fact that a human being by his reason can set himself to achieve an end by choosing the means of its attainment necessarily suggest that the order in nature was founded by human reason. So Aquinas sees eternal law as the law by which God governs the whole universe, and natural law as man's rational participation in eternal law, the order of the precepts of which is according to the order of the natural inclinations.

In addition to eternal and natural law there is divine law, which is the eternal law revealed through the scriptures and, finally, human positive law. Human positive law should conform to reason and thus to the law of God, Aquinas insists.

St. Aquinas evinces his consummate power and skill as a systematizer and synthesizer in his natural law doctrine. His doctrine is a mixture of Greek philosophy (Aristotle), the Roman law and the teaching of the

Christian fathers before him (St. Augustine particularly). One of the most striking features of St. Aquinas' doctrine is its uncompromising appeal to reason, the law of God itself being declared as nothing else than the reason of divine wisdom. Aquinas also appeals to experience and legislation. He recognised that natural law furnishes us broad principles rather than rules for detailed application. He did not hold, (as would have been expected of a christian theologian) that material things constitute an impediment to the spirit. In so far as positive laws are founded on reason they are reflections of eternal law and, thus, ipso facto commends obedience. But suppose the ruler commands us to do something that is clearly unjust - ought we obey him then? St. Thomas Aquinas reply is that there may be subtle dictates of morality which enjoin obedience even to an unreasonable positive law, for instance, to avoid social turmoil. Consequently, sedition is a social evil and inapposite rebellions morally wrong.<sup>7</sup> Certainly, St. Aquinas gave due recognition to man-made or positive law but still regarded the Catholic Church as the supreme interpreter of divine law as contained in the Scriptures to which human dignitaries were responsible in matters relating to eternal law.

This is how St. Thomas Aquinas used his natural law doctrine to uphold the authority of the church while at the same time stressing the need for obedience to man-made laws. But in the end, God is the ultimate arbiter of all laws.

#### NEO-THOMISTIC CONCEPTION OF NATURAL LAW

The epithet "Thomism" is usually used to designate the doctrines of the followers of St. Aquinas. When the saint died in 1274, some philosophers and theologians expressed dissatisfaction with his philosophy. From the sixteenth century to the nineteenth Thomism was in a state of suspended animation. At the dusk of the later period it was important only in the centres of ecclesiastical learning. It was part of the establishment and served mainly as a prolegomenon of theological studies. Dissatisfaction with neo-Kantianism and neo-Hegelianism impelled some teachers in Naples and Rome to begin to look to the synthesis of the doctrines of St. Aquinas although the Dominicans had remained faithful to the teachings of the saint. So it was that by the beginning of the nineteenth century a secular canon Vincenzo Buzetti inspired some Catholics, including the brother of Pope Leo XIII, to the work of restoring Thomism. In this way the foundation for the emergence of neo-Thomism in the nineteenth century was laid.

## GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF NEO-THOMISM

Generally speaking, neo-Thomism flourishes well in countries such as France where the Catholic Church exerts considerable influence. It still takes the form laid down by Saint Thomas Aquinas though it attempts to adapt his tenets to the conditions of modern times. As could be seen from our analysis of St. Aquinas' conception of natural law, natural law is both anterior and superior to positive law and constitutes the attainment of the eternal law of God through the exercise of reason. Consequently, the neo-Thomists "formulate certain very broad and abstract generalization so abstract that they can be regarded as universal,"<sup>8</sup> and which reflect the contemporary emphasis on harmony in the society.

## SPECIFIC THESES

One of the principal representatives of neo-Thomism is Jean Dabin, who held that the law of nature was a moral intuition. Moral intuition prescribes only broad generalizations the detailed working out of which depends on the authority of the Catholic Church. One of the precepts of natural law is concerned with the good of society. Dabin argued that there is a moral duty to obey only positive laws which conform to the dictates of natural law principle of promoting the general good. If a law failed to conform to this principle it is not morally binding but might still retain legal validity. The real making and applying of positive law with the aim of giving effect to the dictates of natural law is an art which only jurists are competent to exercise. In a word, Dabin's position on natural law reflects the attempt to harmonise the restoration of natural law with the protean nature of human ideals and at the same time to take account of the new emphasis on society.

Another neo-Thomist worthy of mention here is Thomas Davitt. Davitt bifurcated law into two: Man-made law (positive law) and man-discovered law (natural law). He began his analysis of natural law by debunking the ideal of natural law based on the alleged state of nature, scriptural authority and economic determinism. He then posed the problem of natural law this way:

*(if there is such a thing as a "more fundamental" and "higher" law for men that is also a natural law, it must somehow be found in the nature of men and be related to a directive judgement that is law.)<sup>9</sup>*

For Davitt, if natural law is actually a law, it must manifest itself as a directive since law is essentially a directive. The way to elucidate the issue

is to search "for something in man's natural way of acting that can be identified either as a directive or as the expression of a directive."<sup>10</sup> This search leads to a teleological conception of man's basic drives(characterised by the fact that they are primarily concerned with self-preservation and with giving of meaning to existence, human existence) deriving from the creator. The basic drives of self preservation, sex, community life, rationality and happiness are tailored towards the fulfillment of the directive of the Prime Orderer, and the complexity of human existence implies a complex intelligence behind it. Davitt defined man-discovered law which

*in terms of what it is in itself, is the directive judgement of the creator ordering means necessary for the common good of all men and promulgated through their basic drives.*<sup>11</sup>

Thus, a man-discovered law "is the elementary demands expressed through a man's basic drives, which are known without a reasoning process."<sup>12</sup> Natural law as elementary drives becomes a natural promulgation of eternal law. Man participates in the order originating in the mind of the Supreme Orderer (eternal law) through the order expressed in his basic drives.

In further analysing the concept and nature of natural law Davitt contends that the order and direction of means to end discernible in man's basic drives and emanating from the directive judgement in the mind of the creator furnishes a rationale for these basic drives. Thus they are not based on reason for they are the promulgation of eternal law in man.

In analysing the content, source and end of man-discovered laws, Davitt's approach is clearly teleological, in keeping with the Thomistic tradition. He quoted profusely from the works of St. Aquinas to elucidate his points. He observed that men know from their master drives, without reasoning, that they are structured for a certain development and perfection in a society for happiness. All actions that are necessary for the attainment of man's teleologically determined nature are, in so far as they are good, demanded by man's nature and therefore according to "natural law." The source of man and his basic drives (which constitute the promulgation of the natural law) is God. Natural law has a supernatural origin, a creator law maker. It is known by reasoning on evidence furnished by the teleological order of things in the world. It is also known by faith though revelation (like the Ten Commandments).

The end of natural law or man-discovered law is a common good, a good that is communicable to all men. the basic drives give men an inkling about what these common goods are that will be communicable to all if their

demands are met. The end of observing the elementary drives of men is the human society pervaded by peace, security and social justice. But man cannot realise these goods perfectly because of his imperfect nature (consequent upon his fall, perhaps). This inability, for Davitt, raises the question as to whether men have the capacity of realising them by themselves, since history shows that these demands have never been met perfectly.

Since natural law or man-discovered law is meant to achieve perfect happiness for man and since all perfect goods belong to the creator, it follows that the creator himself is the end of natural law. But how do we know this? How do we know that the fulfillment of man's existence by observing the natural law expressed through his basic drives is the possession of the creator? Here evidence is clearly not enough because such knowledge is beyond man's natural capacity. What is needed in addition to human reason is faith in revelation. All the other drives of man are subordinate to the supreme end, the creator himself.

The obligation for the observance of natural law is absolute. Man categorically desires happiness and perfect happiness is attained through the creator. Everything naturally desires its ultimate fulfilment and perfection. All other means are subordinated to the achievement of happiness which follows from the way man was made by his creator.

In discussing the relation between natural law and positive law, Davitt followed the Thomistic tradition. The directives received by men from man-discovered law are very broad and few in number. These need to be complemented by man-made or positive laws which are derived from natural law through reason for making particular decisions in concrete situations. Both are "Law" in the sense that they "both are essentially directive judgements ordering means to a common good."<sup>13</sup> But this sense of law is analogous. Man-discovered law is different from man-made law "insofar as they differ in the way each is a directive judgement."<sup>14</sup> Whereas the former comes from God, the latter derives from the intellect.

The sanction of man-discovered law "is the good or evil that follows as reward or punishment for obeying the elementary demands expressed by a man's nature."<sup>15</sup> This sanction is intrinsic not extrinsic. When men violate those basic drives which make up natural law they "impede their self-improvement and progress towards their supreme end and good."<sup>16</sup>

They experience deprivations which otherwise they would not have chosen. As a corollary, punishment can also be corrective in the sense that previous deprivations concomitant with previous violations of the ordering of nature can dispose men to adhere to the tenets of law.

All in all, Thomas Davitt believes, just like Dabin, that a law contained in the constitutions and statutes might still be valid inspite of its unjust command. But in such a case it guides the enactment and promulgation of man-made law. Both natural law and man-made law give directions to life. The principles that guide positive law derive from natural law.

A quotation more from Davitt, which captures the general theme of neo-Thomistic thinking on natural law, and we shall conclude this aspect of our discussion:

*To direct men authoritatively to what is good for them, to judge their refusal to follow such guidance and to remedy or punish accordingly, is to participate in a divine prerogative. Such is the dignity of the position of men who made law. But in order to appreciate his privilege and be equal to their office, law men must know what is in man and realise where in his destiny.<sup>17</sup>*

### SOME COMMENTS

Neo-Thomistic conception of law has continued to influence thinking on law especially in countries where the Catholic Church has considerable sway. It inspired the social teaching of Pope Leo XIII, with the result that many laymen and politicians have used its teachings to augment the ideals and practice of Christian democracy. One of the attractive aspects of neo-Thomism, as exemplified in the social writings of Jaques Maritain, Jean Dabin etc. is its willingness to assimilate and adapt influences from outside its tradition. It thus evinces no fixed and cast-iron doctrine of conformity. This is a tribute to the depth and versatility of its principles.

It is certainly true that some basic behaviour of men like the instinct of self-preservation, the need for the continuation of the human family by procreation and the need for rational life in a society can suggest certain norms of behaviour. These needs and ends can be reasonably held to be in conformity to the nature of man living in such a world as ours. In short, there is some teleology in nature that suggests that men behave in certain ways.

It is also a credit to neo-Thomism that it shares in the credit of those doctrines that hold that positive law should conform to certain principles of human conduct, that such man-made laws should be undergirded by some modicum of morality. Neo-Thomists like Dabin recognised that positive laws, though undergirded by morality, differ from it. A law may be contrary to morals but still retain its legal validity. By recognizing the difference between morality and positive law it avoids some philosophical hassles

entailed in the assertion of philosophers, like St. Augustine, that law is no law except if it be just. Even, the conflicts, contradictions and perplexities of contemporary world suggest that there is need for a closer relation between positive law and those generally accepted standards of civilized behaviour both in national and international planes. It goes without saying that positive laws that flagrantly violate these principles can lead to social turmoil which does nobody any good in the long run.

We may also add that neo-Thomism with some justice recognizes the role of the individual in the society. Unlike in Hegelianism where the individual is submerged and subordinated in the collectivity, neo-Thomists generally espouse democratic principles, of course based on the interpretation of the Catholic Church. Neo-Thomism contains such attractive democratic principles that non-Catholic and even non-Christians expouse some of its social ideals. It is in some sense a celebration of the need to harmonize the requirements of legal thinking with the dynamic and complex nature of present day society.

As an essentially metaphysical system, neo-Thomism allows for a coherent, systematic and organic treatment of social issues. This has the benefit of affording its adherents a comprehensive world-view and ideology which can, to a large extent, determine social action. It is within this context, for instance, that one can properly situate the content of the Papal encyclicals that are issued to guide both the clergy and laymen in Catholic Church.

Nevertheless, neo-Thomism suffers from some drawbacks which stems principally from its teleological nature bequeathed by its forefather St. Thomas Aquinas. The neo-Thomist, Thomas Davitt, following St. Aquinas, holds that natural law is based on the eternal law of God. Even if we ignore the problematic question of the existence or non-existence of God, we still discover that the contradictions in the supposed law of God pose serious problems. How do we know what the eternal law of God is? Can God, a being so different from man communicate such a law to man? Even if it is agreed (and we have by no means agreed) that the Catholic Church is the true interpreter of such a law, one still faces the problem of reconciling the various conflicts in the doctrines of the Catholic Church itself: the way the Dominicans see the law of God differs from the way, say, the Jesuits do. So there is the problem of interpretation of the law of God.

Also noticeable in our analysis of Davitt's conception of natural law is its teleology, a teleology which derives from St. Aquinas who in turn derived it from Aristotle. Davitt holds that man is naturally disposed to good, to happiness. But experience shows that this view is a onesided interpretation

of man as shown by historical facts.

Therefore even if we allow that God laid down the precepts of natural law, it still makes sense to argue that the basic drives of man include the penchant to do evil, especially to his fellowmen. It is in recognition of this fact that John Roth posited a theodicy of protest.<sup>18</sup> So St. Thomas Aquinas and his successors are guilty of one-sidedness or selectivity in reasoning.

Another criticism is that the conception of a higher law from a creator cum law maker is nothing but a religious hangover brought into natural law. I wonder why we need to appeal to a deity to justify our instinct of self-preservation, procreation and rational existence with our fellow human beings in propinquity in a society.

As Dennis Lloyd<sup>19</sup> noted, there is no reason why positive law which employs the conceptions of natural law should "imply the remote conception of a higher law superior to human law and binding on all mankind."<sup>20</sup> Whatever we call natural law must be in some level determined by human nature as it is in the society and the norms and principles of morality prevailing in society.

Neo-Thomists speak of "human nature" as if it were something absolutely immutable and unchanging, as something ordained for all eternity by God. Davitts' view earlier discussed is a typical example. He says, for instance that natural law is a directive, or that it expresses a directive, from God, and this directive is from the eternal mind of God through human existence, the attainment of perfect happiness in God. But scientific development and historical praxis show that human nature is nothing but a bundle of possibilities which are largely historically determined, although certain innate capacities limit the actualization of man's possibilities. Of course, men have some common needs and desires, but this is minimal. Neo-Thomists tend to ignore this fact. They also tend to play down the differences between men. But, as H.L.A. Hart points out, "...the purposes men have for living in a society are too conflicting and varying to make possible such extension of the argument that some fuller overlap of legal rules and moral standards is necessary in this sense."<sup>21</sup> In short, there is no necessity attaching to the relation between natural law and positive law beyond that prescribed by the need for survival in a society.

As a corollary, neo-Thomists see nature as imposing an ideal standard based on arbitrary assumption about man's common rationality which assumption, as we noted earlier, is selective. It selects such nature of man that appeals to a religious sensibility and absolutizes it. No wonder that those who espouse sociological jurisprudence adopt a more factual ap-

proach to natural law thinking.

Jean Dabin talked about "moral intuition." But we know that intuition is very subjective and cannot be easily subjected to the criterion of intersubjectivity. Whose moral intuition is right any way - that of Christ, Buddha, Mohammed etc? Appeal to revelation is of no help either: which is the genuine and true revelation- that contained in the Bible or the Koran? It can not be both, since they contain some contradictory propositions. A muslim will accept the moral injunctions in the Koran while a Christian will opt for the Bible. Who is right in this case?

Similarly, neo-Thomistic concept of natural law, like all natural law doctrines, suffers from the defect of imprecision and ambiguity. In some concrete situations like the use of outer space, euthanasia, contraception and abortion among others, the tenets of natural law are quite difficult to discern in resolving them.

For instance, what is the natural law position on contraception? The 1968 papal encyclical of Pope Paul VI states that contraception is morally wrong. This is based on the Thomistic idea that sex in man, as in animals, is meant solely for procreation. But this view is fallacious. Man is an animal, that is true. But he is a rational animal, a moral being. So it is wrong to use a state of affairs that obtains in the animal world to evaluate human conduct. There is more to sex than the requirement of procreation as obtains in the animal world. In man sex assumes as intellectual and psychological aspects too.

Finally, the teleological undertones in natural law is carried too far by St. Thomas Aquinas and Davitt. Davitt repeatedly highlighted the "directiveness" of natural law. He also talked about the drive in man's existence for that object that "will assure his highest development and perfection and thereby give meaning and happiness to his existence." This is another way of saying that human existence has a tendency towards fulfillment or completion. But how is this to be determined? Opinions will differ so enormously that this tendency ceases to be an objective fact and becomes purely subjective. Besides, the completion of existence of one entity may thwart or annihilate the existence of another, and in such a case it will be difficult to determine which is the natural law. The teleological metaphysics<sup>22</sup> on which the neo-Thomistic natural law idea is based is faulty, at least to that extent.

## CONCLUSION

My attempt in this paper has been to elucidate the neo-Thomistic conception of natural law. In doing this, I touched briefly upon St. Thomas Aquinas' doctrine of natural law. We also discussed the view of Jean Dabin and Thomas Davitt. Afterwards we commented on the merits and inadequacies of neo-Thomistic version of natural law. It is my hope that our brief discussion has shed more light on one aspect of natural law, one version which reflects the influence of religion on the discussion of any topic, especially in social and political matters as well as in philosophy.

## Notes and References

1. See Ronald Hepburn's article "On the philosophical of Nature" in Paul Edwards (ed.) **The Encyclopedia of Philosophy**. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc. & Free Press, 1967, Vols. 5&6, 1967, pp.454-457.
2. Dennis Lloyd, **The Idea of Law**, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1964, p.76.
3. These two meanings, that is, the descriptive and normative sense of natural law have been confused atimes by philosophers. Ulpian, for instance, failed to make a clear distinction between these two senses. The stoics, before Ulpian, made the same mistake. Nowadays, it is recognised that both senses of the law have to be distinguished for clarity of analysis.
4. I am indebted to Dr. C. S. Momoh for the premodern and modern conceptions of natural law. The definition of natural law here given captures the essence of the natural law thinking.
5. St. Thomas Aquinas, **Summa Theological**, quoted in R.W.M. Dias' **Jurisprudence**, (3rd ed.) London: Butterworths, 1970, p.569
6. In his teleological conception of natural law, St. Aquinas classified the principles of natural law into two: primary and secondary principles. The former are eternal, immutable and are discovered by reason. They are known by synderesis, that is, they are known naturally and spontaneously as soon as one reaches the age of reason. Secondary principles are discovered by reflecting on man's natural inclinations. This, as Dr. J.I. Omorogbe rightly pointed out, shows the inconsistency in Thomistic doctrine of natural law an inconsistency which infected neo-Thomism. At the outset of his doctrine, St. Aquinas gave due regards to reason. But as soon as he ventured to reduce moral principles from the natural law, reason moves to the back seat and natural inclinations loom large. See Dr. Omorogbe's article "The Moral Philosophy of St. Aquinas: A Critical Look," in **The Nigerian Journal of Philosophy**, Department of Philosophy, University of Lagos, Vol.2, Nos. 1&2, 1982, pp.22-27.
7. St. Aquinas' reply is really ambiguous here. He was disposed to think that obedience might still be rendered to the ruler in order to avoid chaos and anarchy in the society, and that it should be left to God the ultimate arbiter of law to resolve the situation in his own way. All this reflect the Thomistic and later neo-Thomistic attempt to maintain social cohesion and harmony. Who knows what St. Aquinas' advice to an average German would be during the Nazi regime as regards obedience to such satanic Nazi laws that scandalized and debased humanity.
8. R. W. M. Dias, op. cit., p.589.

9. Thomas E. Davitt, S.J., **The Elements of Law**, Boston: Little Brown & Co., 1959, p.112.
10. Ibid., p.112
11. Ibid., p.116.
12. Ibid., p.116.
13. Ibid., p.151.
14. Ibid., p.151.
15. Ibid., p.156
16. Ibid., p.136.
17. Ibid., p.340.
18. The theodicy of protest as posited by John Roth is a theodicy that holds God partly responsible for some of the avoidable evils in the world. It is a theodicy which calls on God to act here and now. It recognizes, unlike Plotinus, St. Augustine and St. Aquinas, that evil is positively real, that tragedy, pain, injustice, death etc. waste away human life. It believes that the emotions of anger, hostility and sadness men feel towards these evil are profoundly real. Roth based his analysis of this form of theodicy which differs from most theodicies that seek to absolve God completely from the evil in the world on the atrocities which the Nazi under Hitler committed against the Jews at Auschwitz. For more on this article see John Roth's article "Against Despair" in **God: The Contemporary Discussion**, Frederick Sontag & M. Darol Bryant (ed.) New York: The Rose of Sharon Press, Inc. 1982, pp.347-360.
19. See Dennis Lloyd, op. cit., 90-94. His criticisms of the natural law doctrine applies perfectly well for neo-Thomism.
20. Ibid., p.91.
21. H.L.A. Hart, "Positivism And The Separation of Law And Morals," in **The Philosophy of Law**, R.M. Dworkin (ed.) Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1977, p.36.
22. The way St. Thomas Aquinas talked about teleology in things is reflected in the views of scholars like John Wild, Jaques Maritain and Thomas Davitt. Indeed, the way Davitt presented his natural law doctrine (man-discovered law) seems to say that the processes and phenomena in the world exhibit themselves with bold labels announcing their teleological nature. Davitt so absolutized the relation of means to ends that one is left with the impression that teleology is boldly inscribed in processes and objects, forgetting the partial truth in Immanuel Kant's thesis that we know objects as they appear to us in experience. In otherwords, man imposes the logical structure of his mind on objects of experience. Besides, even if there is teleology in things, experience teaches us that such teleology is not always for the achievement of happiness, as Davitt believed. I find it difficult to conceive of a benevolent omnipotent and positively perfect being that allows earthquakes, incurable diseases, hunger, social injustice etc. to afflict the poor and the innocent. What is the positive teleology in all these which Davitt talked about in his **Elements of Law**? I believe that nature, as it is, is indifferent to the fate of this tiny fragile mixture of impure carbon and water, that is, man.

## PRELUDE TO POLITICAL STABILITY

BY

*DR. JIM I. UNAH,*

Three basic issues are of interest in this paper. The first is what I take to be the root of all forms of instability. The second is what I understand to be the challenge of Philosophy in a confused social order plagued by ethnic chauvinism, religious bigotry and political instability. The third and the last is what I consider to be the outline of a sound politics.

### THE SOURCE OF INSTABILITY

There is a fundamental insecurity embedded in man's ontological structure which snowballs into all forms of instability. The origin of every form of instability lies in the fact that we are human. Professor Martin Heidegger has analysed a number of ontological concepts such as guilt, objectless anxiety, anticipatory resoluteness or the *Dasein* in man which, more or less, point to this fundamental insecurity ingrained in man's physiological chemistry. The theory of fundamental insecurity was anticipated by the Heraclitan doctrine of perpetual flux whose canon is that the only thing really real about the world is the cosmic principle of change.

The phenomenon of change itself, that is, frequent social change especially where it is disruptive of the existing political order is another name for political instability which in turn is a manifestation of the fundamental insecurity embedded in man's nature as a radically finite being. Political instability is a form of social instability and all forms of social instability are rooted in man's fundamental insecurity. But then, what is this fundamental insecurity? Jean-Paul Sartre identifies it as that nothingness which lies coiled like a worm in the heart of being. This is saying, in other words, that man has a native ability to be what he is not and not to be what he is. Heidegger calls this state of affair man's ability to be and to be not (existentiality). Man can spontaneously bring about any desired state of affairs to replace an undesired state of affairs. Here, we bear in mind that a desired state of affairs for some members within a given group may turn out not to be desirable for others. Worse still, even for an individual within a given group, what may count as desirable today may not be on another day. This is **insecurity par excellence**. Yet it is to this insecurity, call it anticipatory resoluteness, that we owe all our world-constituting activities. It is to it what we owe all our attempts at organisation, consolidation and stabilization.

## THE TASK OF PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy is a world organising, world consolidating and world stabilizing activity. It is an activity of synthesis.<sup>3</sup> In such a world organising, world consolidating or world stabilizing enterprise one is propelled by an indigent dynamism, that is, by an internal drive, a deep sense of insecurity. There is, therefore, this paradox: That he who must introduce order must himself be a product of disorder; he who must give law must himself be familiar with lawlessness, and he who must give security must himself know insecurity. It is really by design and not by accident that philosophy proceeds by dialectics or critical discussion or a demolition exercise - be the philosopher in question a Platonist, a Hegelian, a Kantian or a Husserlian - and terminates with a new world outlook.

There is yet another paradox of philosophy which is rendered inevitable by the very nature of things. It is this: Whenever philosophy introduces a new world outlook for the purposes of organising, consolidating or stabilizing the world it does violence, by way of repudiation, to the existing world order. That is why philosophy as metaphysical thinking is at once a world repudiatioin and a world constituting activity. In introducing stability into the world, philosophy as metaphysical thinking, by a dialectical exercise, by critical discussion or by a demolition exercise, tears the old world asunder. That is why philosophy is dreaded in any human group where there is a general pathological phobia to decisively confront and actualize historical possibilities. Yet no nation can acquire stature and maturity without such a violent repudiation of the old and the moribund, and the reconstruction of the world with a viable integrative principle of being. We should, perhaps, refresh our minds with the Greek experience to put our discourse in the proper historical context.

## THE GREEK EXPERIENCE

What is Greek metaphysics and Greek epistemology if not the pursuit of objectivity intertwined with the passion for totality. Greek philosophy is a consistency preserving endeavour, a foundational programme, a world constituting activity, a world stabilizing enterprise. While Greek metaphysics was to seek out the ultimate raw-material of the world, Greek epistemology was to make certain that what was identified as the really real was indeed the case. And Greek ethics was to ensure that man attained perfect happiness or lived a well-rounded life guided by reason, that is, to make certain that man achieved mental and emotional stability.

The sense of insecurity of the Athenian which was heightened by social instability in the Greek city state threatened the political stability of the Greek

society and galvanized Plato to pontificate elaborately on how civil society may be made socially just and politically stable. The outcome was *The Republic* in which social justice (and, by extension, political stability) was to depend, not on keeping a promise or paying one's debt or preserving the interest of the strong, but on strict division of labour, that is, on every man doing his job without interference with those of the others.

*Social justice thus may be defined as the principle of a society, consisting of different types of men.... who have combined under the impulse of their need for one another, and by their combination in one society, and their concentration on their separate functions, have made a whole which is perfect because it is the product and the image of the whole of the human mind.*<sup>5</sup>

Such a just society was to be presided over by men who, by dint of rigorous education, had acquired the spiritual power and discipline of philosophy. Plato insisted that only such educated and disciplined men could cognise and synthesize the conflicting interests in society, assign men their rightful place in the scheme of things and ensure stability in civil society. And he concluded rather prophetically that until philosophers take control of state management or those who are in control of state affairs become philosophers, civil society would remain plagued by instability.

The Point of interest here is that justice is the cord which ties society together, and society in this context is construed as "a harmonious union of individuals each of whom has found his life-work in accordance with his natural fitness and his training." For there is nothing more rewarding "for a man than to have his work and to be fitted to do it; there is nothing better for other men and for the whole society than that each should thus be filling the station to which he is entitled." The exercise of authority and the application of law which would guarantee public peace and order and thus political stability are intricately wound up with the satisfaction of mutual interests. What this means is that the application of brute force, without the provision by the state, of adequate opportunities for the citizens to pursue their enlightened self-interests, does not and cannot guarantee public peace, order, stability and civilized progress.

It goes without saying, therefore, that societies without adequate opportunities for human achievement of all sorts are Chaos-prone. That is not to say that all societies with adequate opportunities for human transactions of all kinds are entirely immune to political instability. The point rather is that the ultimate legitimization of the exercise of political power is neither merely the possession nor the mastery of the instrument of repression and

coercion but the provision of adequate opportunities for human achievement of all sorts. The provision of adequate opportunities arises from the doing of genuine political deeds. The doing of genuine political deeds is the vocation of "authentic revolutionaries" under the able steersmanship of a political genius or a creative statesman. A comprehensive account of both the political "virtuoso" and his team of authentic revolutionaries as well as the well-ordered state is the work of a world builder - the metaphysical political thinker - as the works of Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Machiavelli, Hegel, Marx, among others, beautifully illustrate.

As a necessary preliminary step towards political stability, there is the need (having identified the ontological grounds of instability) for the analysis of those mundane, quotidian sociopsychological factors and processes that threaten the dissolution of civil society.

### SOCIAL INSECURITY AND SOCIAL INSTABILITY

Sequel to the thesis of inbuilt insecurity in man is the sociopsychological theory that change in the social order either heightens or mitigates insecurity which in turn either stabilizes or leads to the dissolution of society. Psychologists make a big issue of the claim that certain impulses and drives such as the sex impulse and aggressiveness are factors that inevitably make for war. But these impulses - the fighting instinct and the sex drive - can both either be deflected or sublimated i.e. channelled into socially useful goals. In Greek legend, for instance, angry Ajax is said to have massacred sheep instead of men<sup>7</sup>, and the aggressive instinct can be and has been converted to entertainment pugilism. The "militant order of the Jesuits, the Salvation Army, and the Boy Scouts" are further instances for the sublimation of the aggressive instinct to socially useful goals.

Now, since it is possible, with prudent socio-psychological engineering, for man's bellicose attitudes which are disruptive of society to be diverted to socially edifying goals, builders of civil society should concentrate on the cultivation of peaceful attitudes more so now that industry and technology can only thrive better in an atmosphere of peace. Afterall, it is more natural and profitable for members of the civil society to behave like citizens rather than like soldiers. Karl Mannheim makes this point succinctly clear.

*I would venture to say that it costs a social organisation at least as much energy deliberately to build up warlike attitudes as peaceful ones. Moreover, peaceful attitudes being more in accordance with the ways of an industrialized society, it is more unnatural for us to behave like soldiers than like citizens.*

*It is obvious that here we reach the point where individual psychology calls for the help of sociology. Since the innate psychological equipment for men leaves equally open the possibility of their becoming either warlike or peaceful, it depends on the nature of social institutions and of social regimes, whether man in the mass has a character of one kind or the other.<sup>8</sup>*

Mannheim further counsels that since history and modern civilization have shown that people can live for several hundreds of years without war (citing the Dutch as an example), builders of civil society should painstakingly "identify those mechanisms, those social processes, which tend to turn peaceful attitudes into pug-nacity."<sup>9</sup> These mechanisms and processes should be set in motion to establish peaceful attitudes in chaos-prone societies. For once such peaceful attitudes have been implanted in a social group, amongst a people, it is very difficult for such a people to relapse en masse to the bellicose attitudes, unless of course, it is a case of "collective regression." Collective regression arises from sudden disorientation which triggers off a general sense of insecurity and tension which in turn find outlets in social instability and war.

There are, of course, different specific forms of insecurity which may be compounded by the decay of social institutions and the impotence of social regimes, into collective insecurity.

Mannheim argues, for example, that the insecurity of nomadic peoples compelled by drought or animal epidemics to migrate and plunder their neighbours is different from the tension generated by the primitive accumulation of capital and the exploitation of labour which resulted in the class struggle and social strife at the early stage of industrialism.<sup>10</sup> Mannheim shows that acute structural unemployment resulting from the replacement of human labour with machinery led large masses of people to transform their latent hostility into despair. Such despair leads to disturbances or to partial dissolution of society in which war may appear to be the only avenue of ventilating grievances or "of diverting attention from internal difficulties."<sup>11</sup>

The point is that unemployment leads to frustration and desperation. It destroys integrated labour attitudes formed through long years of training and apprenticeship and "make man's habitual desires and impulses remain ungratified."<sup>12</sup> However, with the passage of time in the development of industrialism, industrial psychological and sociological engineering have made it possible for man's immediate needs to be satisfied by means of unemployment benefits and relief packages. Even at that, Mannheim contends, "the whole life organisation and the family hopes and expectations are annihilated."<sup>13</sup>

What this boils down to is that, at best, industrial sociopsychological engineering can only transform "unorganised insecurity" which leads to general insurrection to "organised insecurity" in which palliative and cosmetic measures are applied to man's dwindling dynamism and significance in society. With such palliative and half-measures, man is reduced to a parasite, a mere passive spectator rather than an active participant in the drama of social existence. The realization by man of his dwindling stature in society - that he has been marginalized, averaged out and levelled down - generates a sense of insecurity which he alone feels and which finds outlet in socially deviant behaviour.

The advantage of organised insecurity over unorganised insecurity is that the crisis or instability generated in the process is manageable and does not lead to a total dissolution of society. The individual's sense of alienation from society is minimized by society's gesture of solidarity. Thus, we draw the curtain here at this level of analysis with a few observatory remarks: Once a society has been founded on a sound principle of social justice its political life is assured of stability. Even at that, there will remain, within civil society, minimal traces of instability mandated by man's fundamental insecurity. Such minimal forms of insecurity and its attendant instability can be further mitigated by a quotidian social engineering or the piece-meal engineering of actual problems of institutions and individuals in society. So although man's insecurity is irremediable, it can be assuaged by social security measures which must of necessity undergo constant adjustments and re-adjustments to meet emergencies and contingencies. Change is inevitable and structures in social institutions should be built to accommodate changes, to take account of emergencies and contingencies. And social regimes should pursue, with vigour and vitality, all the quotidian problems of social existence.

### OUTLINE OF AUTHENTIC POLITICS

It is possible, on the strength of the foregoing, to sketch an outline of a sound and authentic politics. First, the state is the place in which we live, move and have our being. If anything is to be made strong, secure and founded on a solid superstructure, it is the state. For "only the commitment to a state lets a people discover its own essence and destiny and thus itself as a people."<sup>14</sup> But without a creative statesman, without a political genius and inventor, there can be no society. Thus, the first preliminary step towards a sound and genuine politics is the emergence, within the state, of a creative political genius and inventor. The political superman is the one who must fashion the place in which poet, artist and thinker as well as those

who lack the will and moral stamina to create their own work, find their places.<sup>15</sup> Only a political genius can assure both private and public security and preside over "the regulation of motives" which alone makes society possible.<sup>16</sup>

But since the complex organisation of modern governments demand not just one but several skillful state managers, the evolution of a group of "authentic revolutionaries" to take effective control of the state and to guard the opportunities created by the state against alien sabotage is the second necessary step towards the attainment of a sound politics and, by extension, political stability.

This means the abandonment of the current practice of random selection of statesmen in favour of a careful recruitment, grooming, scrutiny and testing of those persons who would take charge of state affairs.<sup>17</sup>

The task of the creative statesman and his group of authentic state managers, apart from consolidating state power and state authority, is the provision of adequate opportunities from which alone human achievements of all sorts can arise. We have shown earlier that this is the main way of averting massive social instability in any given human group. There is nothing more rewarding for a man than to be given the opportunity to do the job for which he is best suited. Lack of opportunities generate tension, frustration and crisis which find outlets in social disturbances and war. It needs be emphasised, therefore, that political stability is achieve not by the executive of some putative scientific political blueprints, but by the actual doing of political deeds. This leads to the third factor incidental to political stability, namely, the attitude to political forms.

It is important for those who happen to be in control of state affairs to maintain a steady and faithful attitude to the form of politics in operation. Only a faithful and steady attitude to political form or system concretizes politics. A political form or system that seeks genuine solution for a people's problem must be a true reflection of the dominant human nature and social reality. A political form or system is not necessarily the best just because it is successful elsewhere. Politics is not a science comparable to natural science. There cannot be a fundamentally uniform politics. Political forms are human acts invented in the working out of a people's destiny which is rooted in their cultural heritage. Authentic politics consists in the doing and preserving of political deeds. It involves the utilization of the opportunities afforded by a people's cultural endowments by way of renovation and preservation. Authentic politics is the doing-a-new-with-a-difference on the basis of what has been done before. According to Barnard

Dauenhauer, "..... the realm of politics always involves the old, politics the institution of a world on the ground of both the earth and earlier worlds. It is a projection rooted in a preservation. It is the working out of a people's destiny which is cast before it by its heritage....."<sup>18</sup>

It follows from the foregoing that it is entirely trivial to dwell on the controversy whether capitalism or socialism furnishes the best political arrangement. Neither socialism nor capitalism has secure foundation. "For forms of government", says Alexander Pope, "let fools contest. Whatever is best administered is the best."<sup>19</sup> There is no form of government that cannot be used to mitigate man's insecurity and conversely, there is no form of government that cannot be used to exacerbate man's social and economic plight.<sup>20</sup> Whether or not man's insecurity in civil society is heightened or assuaged depends largely on the level of philosophical radicalism and sociopsychological engineering of the problems of daily existence as well as the extent of commitment of social regimes.

## CONCLUSION

From the foregoing analysis of the fundamental sources of man's insecurity and social instability the following conclusions are inevitable. Although man's insecurity is deeply rooted in his nature as a radically finite being, it could be made good by the availability of adequate opportunities for human transactions of all sorts. Social and political instabilities which arise from man's sense of insecurity could also be mitigated by the commitment of social regimes to the problems of daily existence.

Therefore, let the philosopher - the world builder - embark on a radical criticism of the old and the moribund and fabricate a social and political order consonant with our nature and our stark social reality. And let those who are theoreticians - those who are concerned with the application of social theories - and the social regimes (all those in charge of actual execution of state programmes) show commitment, sincerity and tenacity of purpose. Let those who happen to be in control of state affairs, the social regimes, the political order, divert our people's energies and desire for socialism and violent social rebellion to productive capitalism. The logic of capitalism is relentless productivity and investment. The remedy we seek is not in jumping from one alien political form to another, but in the firm resolve to seize upon our radical finite and actualize our historical possibilities.. We should perfect what we have by relentless socio-psychological engineering and philosophical radicalism. That is the way we can mitigate our depending sense of insecurity, sanitize politics and minimize, not abolish, all forms of social instability.

## Notes and References

1. Heidegger's analyses of these concepts are contained mainly in two of his works namely, **Existence and Being**. (London; Vision Press, Ltd., 1956, pp. 277 - 320) and **Being and Time** (trans. by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, Oxford; Basil Blackwell, 1962,
2. J. P. Sartre, **Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology**, Trans. by Hazel Barnes, London; Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1943, p. 21.
3. For details, see J. I. Unah, "Disguised Denials of African Philosophy" in **Journal of African Philosophy and studies** vol. 1, Nos. 1 & 2, pp. 49 - 56.
4. See John Tucker, "Clashes Between Paradigms for Logic" in **The Nigerian Journal of Philosophy** vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 81 - 96.
5. E. Barker, **Greek Political Theory, Plato and his Predecessors**, 1925, pp. 176 - 177.
6. G. H. Sabine and T. L. Thorson, **A History of Political Theory** Hinsdale, Illinois: Dryden Press, 1973, p. 64.
7. See Kari Mannheim, **Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction: Studies in Modern Social Structure**, London and Henley; Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1935, p. 122.
8. Ibid. p. 123.
9. Ibid. p. 124.
10. Ibid. p. 125.
11. Ibid. p. 125.
12. Ibid. p. 128.
13. Ibid. p. 128.
14. Karsten Harries, "Heidegger as a Political Thinker" **The Review of Metaphysics** Vol. XXIX, No. 4. p. 657.
15. Ibid. p. 657.
16. See G. H. Sabine and T. L. Thorson, **Op. Cit.** p. 430.
17. The method of grooming is set out in some details in J. I. Unah, "The Creative Statesman: On the legitimacy of the Exercise of Political Power" **The Nigerian Business Review**, Lagos, Ntiedyong Hall (forthcoming).
18. Bernard P. Dauenauer, "Renovating the problem of Politics". **The Review of Metaphysics** vol. 29, No. 4, p. 636.
19. Alexander Pope, **An Essay on Man** ed. Maynard Mack, London, Yale University Press, 1950, pp. 123 - 124.
20. J. I. Unah, **The Nature of Nothing in Heidegger's Phenomenological Ontology** (Ph. D. Thesis, Lagos, 1988), pp. 316 - 319.

## The Idea of Freedom in Kwame Nkrumah's Political Philosophy

By

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### O. On the Meaning of Freedom

The question what is freedom and whether it means the same thing to all peoples at all places and at all times is without doubt a very difficult question to answer satisfactorily. It is therefore reasonable to begin with what we regard as a common-sense view of freedom. A man believes he is free if he acts out of his own volition without a coercion from anyone or authority. Bertrand Russell seems to support this view when he defines that "Freedom in general may be defined as absence of obstacles to the realization of desires."<sup>1</sup>

But what prevents another person from legitimately raising the objection that the absence of coercion may not be a sufficient and necessary condition for defining freedom? One's answer might well be that as one keeps to the ordinary usage of the language, one believes it is sufficient. This is not to say one is correct in one's response, but we have earlier raised the question that the concept of freedom might not mean the same thing for all peoples in all places and at all times. Take for an example, in highly developed society where through mass media and mass culture the ruling class has successfully indoctrinated the people to the extent that the citizens naturally desire what their rulers desire them to desire, without it ever occurring to them that there are alternatives to what they are accustomed or infact that they are, to borrow an expression from Herbert Marcuse, "one dimensional" people. In this instance, what are we to say? Is it the case that they are free or that they are not free?

Freedom is not, however, supposed to be considered merely as an abstract term, for it arises in the relations of man to man and in specific conditions of life. It therefore means that the individual who forms an important part of the social being can be meaningful when discussed within the context of what obtains in his social milieu and his sociohistorical environment.

This is the reason why many philosophers are divided on the issue of individual liberty and state's encroachment. There are state's those who see freedom as something which belongs to individual to be defended

against the encroachments of the state. John Locke typifies this group of European liberals who made property and free-trade the central themes of their philosophical enterprises. The stout defence of individualism is good but it has its danger, and in the western world today, it has contributed to development of capitalism, a situation where wealth is monopolized by a few aggressive entrepreneurs with the majority of the populace subjected to the former's whims and caprices - freedom only for the few!

There are those who see Freedom as something which belongs to the society and which the state as the central instrument of social betterment can be made to enlarge and improve. J.J. Rousseau shares this view when he writes "as long as the state belongs to the people, the enlargement of the power of the state is equally an enlargement of the power of the people and therefore of its citizens."<sup>2</sup> This view also has its danger and in Hobbes' memorable statement "the liberties of subjects depend on the silence of the law."<sup>3</sup> But where the law chooses not to be silent as in any authoritarian regime, it would mean deprivation of personal freedom for dissident citizens.

And as for the philosopher who claims freedom is a mere illusion of man, we are likely to find that behind his metaphysics is a strong desire to maintain a status quo; a social injustice arising from social inequality in a society where a few enjoy control over property, means of production, the educational system, and the media of communication and are therefore placed in a position to restrict the freedom of the less-privileged.

If freedom is a universal concept, a precious commodity which men everywhere cherish and for which they are prepared to lay down their lives, then where comes in the African? Is it the case that he is immune to this universal concept of man? Certainly not. He seems even more concerned. We need to understand the African of the twentieth century if he is particularly sensitive on the issue of freedom. He appears selective in his kinds of freedom. First, he wants political freedom, because he knows that the extent to which this liberty is accorded and exercised will also affect the extent to which liberty is available in other areas of social life.

Freedom for him means everything, including life itself. His immediate historical past or experience stands as a vivid evidence; an evidence of man's inhumanity to man, and to use Rousseau's words, but in a modified form: The African was born free, but about four hundred years he was to remain in chain everywhere. First, his person was tampered with and when there was a global change in production, the resources of his land and labour were removed under his very nose, leaving him an impoverished species of

human being. Could it therefore be an accident that Freedom forms an important theme in the political philosophy of Kwame Nkrumah?

**1. Background to Nkrumah's Political Thinking.**

Kwame Nkrumah was a colonial student, a professional philosopher and a revolutionary leader. He was aware of his social status a colonial subject' when he departed for United States of America for studies in 1935 and that he refers to himself repeatedly in his book **Consciencism** as a colonial student is a testimony of a consciousness in him that he was fully emancipated human being. Furthermore, he was prepared to endure the additional social stigma of being a 'nigger', that is, a black man in a country still riddled by racial discrimination.

However, like many destined men of fate, these seemingly unsurmountable obstacles could not deter him in his ambition of obtaining higher education and leading his people towards total freedom - political, economic and cultural.

He majored in Philosophy and Political Science at both the University of Lincoln and the University of Pennsylvania. When and what factors turned his mind to revolutionary thoughts, we have very scanty knowledge, but one thing was certain, he maintained even while a student, that the struggle for freedom should begin with intellectualism. The mind needs to be emancipated. What one requires he writes "is a discriminating minds"<sup>4</sup>

He consequently chose philosophy itself as his object of political analysis. First, he showed his concern on how it was taught in many western universities and secondly what would be the effects of such teaching on gullible, unsuspecting colonial students. It is in the context of that he refers in his book **Consciencism** to great Philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, Kant, Hegel, etc. as university philosophers because the ideas of these men were being taught in such a very abstract manner as if these ideas did not arise from human experience or have no relevance to human life.

According to Nkrumah, there lies the danger for the colonial students who after listening to such lofty metaphysical ideas as idealism, role of God in human affairs, universal brotherhood of man, natural laws and justice etc. would be carried away and tend to forget their real position in the existent social reality as members of a race condemned to an indefinite tutelage, exploitation and oppression. This way such students imbibed ideas and values which would not only have relevance to their social environment but hastened their alienation from their own people and in the words of Walter Rodney " Some reached a point of total estrangement from

African conditions and African way of life and like Blaise Diagne of Senegal they chirped happily that they were and would always be Europeans"<sup>5</sup> or as Frantz Fanon aptly put it: people in black skin but with white mask.<sup>6</sup> Nkrumah concluded that such colonial students were bound to turn out to be lackeys, men who would compromise even on principles and cannot be relied upon to lead and worth while struggle for liberation.

It would therefore appear that Nkrumah believes that if one is selective in imbibing ideas, it would not necessarily amount to being parochial or narrow-minded, rather it would only indicate that one is not losing sight of a vital goal. It is in this context that he conceives all philosophies, even the most seemingly very abstract metaphysics as "products of their social milieu".<sup>8</sup> If they are not, then I would join by asking how can one explain why a titan like Aristotle should regard slavery as natural and lawful? It could only be that in supporting the exploitation of slave labour, Aristotle was merely reflecting what was social fact in the ancient Greek city-states, for he writes "Greeks should not be enslaved, but inferior races with less spirit"<sup>9</sup> and in writing also that "the principle of order in a political society is justice, the bond of men in society."<sup>10</sup> We ask, what justice can slave be said to enjoy in a slave-owing society?

Nkrumah was therefore convinced that any worthwhile struggle for freedom from colonialism and imperialism would have to be practical problems of society. This is the rationale behind the birth of "philosophical conscientism", Nkrumah's philosophy for decolonisation and which is meant to be the animating spirit or nucleus of an emergent ideology for any emancipated African state.

Kwame Nkrumah continuously emphasizes the need for an ideology both during and after the struggle for political independence in Africa as a means of attaining freedom for people of the continent. He remarks: A Marxist's emphasis on the determining force of material circumstances of life is correct but I would like to give great emphasis to determining power of ideology... a positive creative theory, the guiding theory of the emerging social order."<sup>11</sup> But what type of ideology? According to Nkrumah capitalism, being the prop of colonialism and an identified 'culprit' of exploitation and oppression cannot equally be used as a platform or basis of freeing the African people from colonial bondage for which it has earlier served an effective means to establish. It would amount to a contradiction. It is on this basis that Nkrumah rejects capitalism and any philosophical system that may implicitly or explicitly lend support to it.

Philosophical conscientism provides us with Nkrumah's view on

individual's freedom and extent of state's interference. This is simply stated: philosophical conscientism is the attempt to bring into modern focus the age-long principle of egalitarianism or humanism which underlies the traditional African society - a principle that enjoins a man to be his brother's keeper. In this way, he states "the emancipation of African continent is the emancipation of man and it requires two aims: The restitution of the egalitarianism of human society and the logistic mobilization of all our resources towards the attainment of the restitution."<sup>12</sup>

This, we believe clearly implies that the freedom of individual is guaranteed as long as the individual does not encroach on the freedom of other members of the society or individual freedom is not used as an excuse or cover for exploitation and more importantly that the individual is not opposed to the general aspiration of the society. Nkrumah, undoubtedly believes that this egalitarianism is only attainable in a socialist society where the fruits of labour can best be distributed on the basis of need.

The emergent libertarian ideology, Nkrumah also hopes, would take care of real social conditions of Africa today, by containing African experience of Islamic and Euro-Christian influences as well as the experience of the traditional society; employing all these for the harmonious growth and development of society.

Nkrumah's skepticism about religion is not derived from a total atheism for he writes "philosophical conscientism even though deeply rooted in materialism is not necessarily atheistic."<sup>13</sup> This is an evidence to show that Nkrumah accepts religion as a useful social factor, but only as long as it does not degenerate in the hands of people who will not hesitate to use it to cause social disunity and unrest or those who might use it as a justification for unequal distribution of material wealth among men. For is it not the calvinist christian doctrine that forms the moral bedrock of the apartheid racial policy in south Africa. The Ku Klux Klan sect is a powerful christian group in the United States of America which justifies its atrocities such as murder, arson, etc., on religious ground. It means that religious freedom will be guaranteed for those who are religiously inclined to the extent that they do not through their religious practices encroached on the liberty of others in the society and of the freedom of the state to direct the course of the common aspiration of the society.

## 2. Freedom Means Positive Action.

Was Plato's hope that a philosopher is best suited to become the ruler of a state about to be fulfilled in Kwame Nkrumah? It could be, but the main

concern of the impatient libertarian-minded colonial subject who arrived in Takoradi in 1947, after twelve years sojourn in the United State of America and Britain, was how to secure immediate political freedom for his people and fatherlands. The Gold Coast. He knew that political freedom for a people is only an aspect of the larger universal concept of freedom, but for him and all 'subject people', it was the most relevant and his dictum: "Seek ye first, the political kingdom and all things will be added to it", <sup>14</sup> further showed the man who was conscious of his problems, possibilities and the goal he has set himself to accomplish.

Furthermore, for the man who titled a major work of his: **I speak of Freedom**, we feel no special talent is required of anyone to understand what his mind is. To Nkrumah, freedom is not an abstract concept, but a practical action; and such a practical action can only be guided aright by a liberated philosophical orientation. Hence, his philosophical conscientism.

As earlier indicated, Nkrumah believed that philosophies are best adapted to practice and will certainly be more useful to mankind than when they are confined to the four walls of a university lecture room. Hence, he declared that positive freedom for old Gold Coast and the whole of Africa by implication required 'positive action'. Positive action is the demand for political freedom now, and not as soon as possible, backed by the uncompromising will of the whole populace. It is a right that could neither be compromised nor delayed by any imperialist's tactics.

Thus, when Nkrumah was appointed the secretary-General of the United Gold Coast Convention (U.G.C.C.) in 1947, he quickly realised that its conservative leadership were opposed to the mass aspirations of the people, and he quitted. Positive action became the basis on which the Convention Peoples' Party (C.P.P.) was founded on August 1, 1949 and its success lay in two key words: MOBILISATION and ORGANISATION. In this way, two very important elements in political philosophy were put into active use; first was an ideology for de-colonisation and second, was designated positive action with in-built strategies and programme, all directed towards one objective: political freedom now.

The people were mobilised, educated politically and made to see glaringly the hypocrisy of Britain as a colonial power, who as a member of the allied forces during the second world war not only relied heavily on the human and natural resources of her colonies but also carried out propaganda that free men all over the world were fighting fascist dictatorship of Hitler and the Nazis and therefore self-determination for all. The war having ended, the promised freedom was not to be extended to colonial peoples.

Rather they adopted such expressions as reforms and other shabby gestures of setting up fake machinery for gradual evolution towards self-government. These were deceitful tactics of imperialism. In the words of Nkrumah: "The imperialist contention of unreadiness for self-government is blind. What right has any colonial power to except Africans to become Europeans or to have a hundred per cent literacy before it considers them for self-government. Wasn't the African who is now considered unprepared to govern himself that rule himself before the advent of the Europeans."<sup>15</sup> He then illustrated with the Russian who some years ago, pre-1917 revolution, were almost as backward in modern western technology as colonial people of the world.

What one needs pay attention to is the collectivity which the concept "freedom" seems to assume here. In it, all segments of the populace, the peasantry, the workers, the youths, the women and the land are all taken as one entity which requires freedom. This is a marked distinction between Nkrumah's notion of freedom and the eighteen century European social contractarian's - Rousseau, Locke, Holbach, Voltaire, etc, and on the one hand, the Marxian class conception of freedom. The distinction is perhaps owing to the different socio-historical conditions of the different periods affected.

Could it have been that Nkrumah in first seeking collective, territorial political freedom was not aware of the essence of imperialism - which is economic domination and exploitation? He was much aware, for he wrote: There are three fundamental doctrines in the philosophical analysis of imperialism. First is the doctrine of exploitation; second, is the doctrine of trusteeship or partnership and third is the doctrine of assimilation. Exponents of these doctrines believe implicitly or explicitly in the right of stronger peoples to exploit the weaker ones; to develop world resources and civilize backward peoples against their will.<sup>17</sup> His awareness of other kinds of freedom a people need cannot be expressed better than in his own speech in the Ghana House of Assembly as follows: " We have by our united effort achieved political freedom. This is a great achievement. What is our next united task? It is the achievement of economic justice: freedom from want, freedom from disease, filth and squalor. Industrial and agricultural development are essential for the achievement of our aim. Our slogan from now should be 'serve Ghana now'.<sup>18</sup>

### **3. His notion of Continental Freedom**

Nkrumah's ultimate goal as a libertarian philosopher cum-practical politician was the liberation of all of Africa from alien rule. The first step

was to win individual-territorial national independence a realistic approach. The second was to knit together the newly freed peoples of the continent within a single political structure. His belief in African unity, perhaps rests both on the collaboration and establishment of a common front against what are regarded as Africa's enemies so as to safeguard and deepen Africa's freedom and the conviction that Africans had shared and will continue to share a common experience and destiny.

Whether the consolidation of individual-territorial African states and the wish for a continental unity would be contradictory or complimentary is a problem no philosopher or political leader on the continent has been able to solve. However, Nkrumah continued to hope that as African states achieve independence, they would sweep aside the arbitrary boundaries imposed by colonialists which cut across tribes and overrode the dictates of geography and economics. For him, the continent which had been partitioned to meet colonial convenience would now be re-shared to realise its 'natural' contours and return to its African essence - true freedom.

This sentiment found expression in one of the resolutions of the first All-African Peoples' Conference which met in Accra in 1958. Speaking up for the unity of Africa and a commonwealth of free African states, this resolution: "denounces artificial frontiers drawn by imperialist powers to divide peoples of Africa particularly those which cut across ethnic groups and divide people of the same stock, calls for the abolition or adjustment of such frontiers at an early date; calls upon the independent states of Africa to support a permanent solution to this problem founded upon the wishes of the people."<sup>19</sup>

It is becoming obvious therefore that Nkrumah believed that the territorial freedom of particular African states takes on its full meaning only if all of Africa is free and if African unity is achieved by eliminating all the artificial frontiers created by the colonialists, but in essence bound people into strange territories, strange association against their socio-genesis and socio-cultural background.

However, not all persons share Nkrumah's contention that the fragmentation and lack of unity in Africa was due to colonialism. Rupert Emerson belongs to such a group and he writes: "The accusation that the colonial powers arbitrarily divided Africa among themselves rested on indisputable historical evidence; the further accusation that they had broken a pre-existing unity could be established only on a reconstruction of history. The balkanisation of Africa is an old established matter to which colonialism only added new dimensions."<sup>20</sup>

Nkrumah was not a mere political dreamer and it was not for nothing that Ghana under him served as a base for freedom fighters throughout Africa. He strongly believed that in quest for Africa's liberation and unity, the African personality must necessarily evolve for he said: "For too long in our history, Africa has spoken through the voice of others. Now what I have called African personality in international affairs will have a chance of making its proper impact."<sup>21</sup>

The doctrine of pan-Africanism was beset from its origin by strong opposition and other problems and if many Africans are still held under racial or colonial bondage or if a United States of Africa has not emerged it is due to the extent to which vested interests could go to kill an opposing idea.

First, the doctrine did not find favour with some African leaders. They were suspicious of Nkrumah's intention and even feared his personality. Thus they showed manifest disinclination to accept the proffered headship of Nkrumah himself in a potential African union. Opponents of pan-Africanism include the late-President Sylvanus Olympio of Togoland who commented: "In their struggle against the colonial powers, the new African states arbitrarily and unrealistic as their original boundaries may have been managed at last to mobilize the will of their citizens toward the attainment of national independence. Achieved at a great sacrifice, such a reward is not to be cast away lightly; nor should the national will once unified be diluted by the formation of nebulous units."<sup>22</sup>

The first prime Minister of liberated Nigeria, Tafawa Balewa, also remarked that his country had waited one hundred years for freedom and did not intend to throw it away on gaining independence. Nonetheless, there were a few supporters such as Late President Modibo Keita (Mali) who said: "the countries of Africa can never achieve full independence as long as they remain small and each concentrates on itself alone."<sup>23</sup>

Other opposing problems include the regionalism of geography, language, and national sentiments, orientation. The latter were responsible for the creation of the Casablanca and Monrovia blocs in 1961, each, in favour of socialism and capitalism respectively. To some extent, some African leaders were tools of neo-colonialism.

Another problem that faced Nkrumah's notion of collective all-African freedom was that whether in practical terms it include the Arabs and the Berbers who inhabit North Africa? Nkrumah favoured their inclusion, but this is opposed particularly by exponents of 'negritude' such as Aime Cesaire and Lepold Senghor who write: "negritude is the whole complex of

civilized values - cultural, economic, social and political which characterize the black peoples or more precisely the negro-African world.<sup>24</sup>

Today, we have the Organisation of African Unity (O.A.U.) a symbol of African freedom and unity, but whose members are busy warring among themselves and showing delight in their economic dependency on their ex-colonial rulers.

#### 4. Impact of neo-colonialism on Freedom.

Is a man free who lives on charity and who is told what to do and how to do it? If we cannot regard him a free person, then we are beginning to have an insight into a horror named neo-colonialism - a phenomenon which Nkrumah has repeatedly regarded as a greater danger to all liberated African countries than colonialism itself. For is it not a common economic experience that wherever there is economic dependence, there is no freedom?

The essence of neo-colonialism is that state which is subject to it, is in theory free, independent, and has all the outward trappings of international sovereignty; in reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside. A vivid example today is the IMF/World Bank imposed so-called structural adjustment programme - SAP - and its attendant polices.

Its danger is loudly sounded by this statement of Nkrumah: Neo-colonialism is subtle economic trapping capable of alienating leaders from the very people who put them in power and instead of providing true leadership and guidance which is formed by the ideal of the general welfare, they become instruments of suppression on behalf of the neo-colonialists.<sup>25</sup>

How does neo-colonialism operate, and in what way does it erode national and individual freedom? Since colonialism is rapidly becoming anachronism in the twentieth century, neo-colonialism, a more subtle method is brought to replace it. Both phenomena have their roots in seeking economic advantage. Economic aids are offered for development; defence pacts are signed for mutual protection and in some cases foreign military bases are built; foreign cultural institutions are freely established. But behind all these moves or facades is a truism that capitalism is the embodiment of the philosophy of self-interest. For the so-called assistance to under developed nations is nothing but a further means to exploitation. In return for their assistance, neo-colonialists request for concessions in mining, construction, banking and commerce generally and in addition they seek protection against nationalisation. In the process, giant international

finance and industrial monopolies with powerful arms like those of an octopus maintain a tight grip on all important economic activities of the nation. Where then lies freedom of the African? Resources are taken away under the very nose of the people to add to the already bulging wealth of the capitalist world and the African seems helpless. With the connivance of a few indigenous bourgeois businessmen and bureaucrats, territorially free countries on the continent are impoverished while their citizens receive pittance as wages and prices for their primary products. Kwame Nkrumah was quite critical of this situation with special reference to the Congo disaster and he warned: "To allow a foreign country especially one which is loaded with economic interests in our continent to tell us what political decisions to take, political courses to follow is indeed for us to hand back our independence to the oppressor on a silver platter." <sup>26</sup>

However, since the territorially freed African states and indeed all under developed nations cannot escape having to deal with advanced countries and their capital, Nkrumah has suggested the adoption of non-alignment foreign policy based on the co-operation with all states whether they be capitalist or socialist, and in this wise, he writes: "Foreign capital has to be invested in accordance with a national plan drawn up by the government of the non-aligned state with her own interest in mind" <sup>27</sup> in order to safeguard the latter's freedom.

### CONCLUSION

What we have been doing in this paper is to attempt a critical analysis of the concept of freedom in the political philosophy of Kwame Nkrumah. It remains an attempt, for nothing can be more elusive in handling and prone to making one's assertion fallacious than a scholaristic discussion on the concept of freedom, moreover when it has to be within the context of a particular view.

Some critics of Nkrumah's views on freedom, particularly on individual freedom are likely to argue that how consistent would it be for a man to preach freedom of any kind and at the same time behave like a dictator who keeps political opponents away in detention. This obviously will appear in their view to be a contradiction; but then a little reflection might have shown such skeptics that in practical politics, decisions are often taken to solve particular problems which are not likely to be identical to any theory that might have given rise to them. The denial of civil liberties to a few dissident elements by Nkrumah is bad enough, but to assert however that the mass of the people lived in terror during his regime is to falsify truth.

If one is honest enough and one has read most of his works, then there should not have appeared to one any contradiction between Nkrumah's actions when he was at the helm of affairs in Ghana and his belief in freedom, particularly freedom of the individual. He was consistent enough, having repeatedly maintained that while he believed in fundamental human rights, he also believed that they could only be meaningful goals and aspirations of the society and mankind in general. In short, he desired a truly egalitarian society where class distinction will be minimal and if possible totally absent. Would such a situation be realisable if there was to be unlimited freedom particularly if they conform with the of accumulation, use and disposal of one's property? Nothing would then prevent a selfish propertied class from sabotaging genuine efforts of the ruler at improving the general welfare of the people.

The point here is not to serve as an apologist of Nkrumah's views but rather to set out the facts as objectively as possible. I believe, nevertheless that the concept of freedom which pervades all the literary works of Nkrumah is not certainly that abstract idea meant to be the monopoly of the learned, rather it is concrete idea, meant to vitalize and serve as the core of a philosophy and political ideology whose aim will be to free and unite oppressed people in Africa, and perhaps, in the world in general - a freedom from exploitation, oppression, suppression, dehumanisation and assimilation.

It is a freedom which is least hypocritical in its assertions; a freedom which is aimed at allowing all and sundry to share in the fruits of their labour won from the natural resources of their lands. It is not an empty metaphysical concoction of a freedom which probably due to some innate or artificial advantage allows a minority class to exploit the rest populace and permits stronger nations to enslave weaker ones.

Enshrined in the constitutions of many nations of the world and in the charter of the United Nations Organisation are the fundamental human rights or otherwise referred to as the inalienable rights of man. But have greed for power, material wealth and narrow national interests not made people's conscience to be suppressed and their faces turned another way when peoples other than their own are being worked to death to produce for a few idle rich?

How many eyebrows were raised by men of conscience at the brutality and dehumanisation going on in the Republic of South Africa or when napalm bombs were thrown at defenceless people of colonial Angola.

We are not an inch away from the truth then if we assert that mankind is still far away from those kinds of freedom that would guarantee peace

and harmony for all, while at the same time remove fear of enslavement, exploitation, oppression, poverty, diseases, squalor and filth from our midst.

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Phenomenalism As a Theory of Perception:  
A Critical Notice

By

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Phenomenalism is the thesis that physical objects are logical constructions out of sense data. The implication of this is that physical objects are not immediate objects of perception. Rather, they are arrived at by inference. The immediate or direct objects of perception are the sense data. Thus, sense data are thought to comprise the scope of empirical knowledge. As the only entities that can be known in perception, or the only ones known with any certainty, the common world of material objects which had been the starting point of analysis has ceased to be recognizable. Not only that, they had ceased to be reconstructible.<sup>1</sup>

Many philosophers today are inclined to think that the sense datum theory no longer needs autopsy but only embalment. Renowned men like Austin, Ryle and Wittgenstein are said to have signed the certificate of death for sense-datum theory. To these men, the programme of translating material objects statements into assorted descriptions of sense-data is an impossibility. For example, Wittgenstein described the attempt to detach colour-impressions from objects as though they were membranes.<sup>2</sup> To Ryle, it was a linguistic howler for sense-datum theory to skin an "ethereal" cream off ordinary lacuna descriptions of common objects.<sup>3</sup> And for Austin, numerous facts about perception had been distorted in order to promote the interest of an immaterial something.<sup>4</sup>

This paper, therefore, critically considers the question whether there is any need for sense-datum analysis. Various objections that have been raised against the programme of translating material object statements into assorted descriptions sense data are briefly examined. The view that resulted from these objections, namely, sense-datum analysis need never have existed is what I want to challenge. I take this view to amount to another one, namely, there is essentially no philosophical problem of perception. I hold that the account of illusions, hallucinations and other similar phenomena about our sensory life, have a place in an adequate theory of knowledge. However, in what looks like a defense of that sense-datum analysis I undertake in this paper, I am not committed to the view that material objects are nothing but sense data. My argument is that sense-

datum language would do no more than complement material object language.<sup>3</sup>

First, how plausible is the claim that physical objects are only known by inference and hence the claim that they are logical constructions out of sense-data? It has been objected that we cannot by seeing certain patterns of colour and shapes infer that there is a pile of books on the table. What we see on the table are the books and both the tables and the books are seen directly and not by inference.

But, the phenomenalist would answer by making explicit what he means by an inference in this case. He would distinguish the logical from the psychological meaning of inference and say he is using inference in the logical sense.

Psychologically, there is the inference we make when we claim the existence of material objects cannot be recognised. But logically our claim about these objects is an inference. We make such claims only when we experience certain kind of sense data and we are able to relate it to others we have experience before.

When we first come to the world, probably we saw only a round, bulgy patch in our visual field. But after a while when we continued to have similar experiences and they fell into orderly patterns, and after we found our visual sense data to be good indices of touch sense data, we then needed to sense the red round patch to conclude that there is tomato.<sup>6</sup>

The phenomenalist further argues that physical object language is a stronger claim and takes much to defend than sense-datum language. The reason for this, it is claimed, is because physical object language is inferential and still requires more to back it up. But since we cannot be mistaken about the data of our sense, though we can describe them mistakenly, sense data are only entities to be known in perception or the only ones known with any certainty. Physical object reports are not indubitable.<sup>7</sup>

Logically speaking, it seems to me that the phenomenalist claim is true. It is only by using the sense data we experienced as evidence that we claim the existence of physical objects.

If, for example, we experienced no sense data of sight, touch, hearing and so on, we would never know anything about the physical world. Sense-datum language, in its orthodox use, seeks to elucidate judgments of perception, to show consonance between sense experience and common knowledge. However, this does not mean that the common world of material objects, the starting point of sense-datum analysis, has ceased to

be recognizable. Instead of either questioning or opposing the standard objective knowledge, sense datum analysis only begins by adopting them in order to trace back the truth of common sense to their origin in those occasions when we claim truly to be perceiving material objects. It is only in this sense I think that our sense data are the main access to that world.

The above claims do not commit one to the view that experiencing sense-data is to know things about that world. Sensing is not knowing,<sup>8</sup> it is only a prerequisite for knowing. Knowledge is a combination of sensing and observing.<sup>9</sup> There is a distinction between sensing and observing. Sensing is direct awareness of sense-data, that is, of colour patches, sounds, smells etc. Observing involves perceptual consciousness, a combination of sensing and a further mental act or process, the taking for granted or rational belief that there is present to the senses the material object specified by the sense data. The belief of the phenomenalist or any sense datum theory<sup>10</sup> is that sensing is a fundamental form of knowing. The reason is that its essential features are immediacy or certainty. In the words of Price:

*When I see a tomato, for example, I may doubt whether it is a tomato or imitation or an hallucination, but I cannot doubt 'that there exists a red patch of a round and somewhat bulgy shape-viz, a sense-datum*<sup>11</sup>

Hence, the phenomenalist or sense-datum theorist in general is committed to the view that in perceiving, there is always an immediate incorrigible and so unvarying excellent awareness of an existent.

However, when we say that our sense data are the main access to the material world, we are not saying that physical objects are nothing but sense-data. This position offends the character of our experience and hence common sense. And according to Moore, "whenever analysis leads to a position incompatible with common sense, there was no alternative but to condemn the analysis, for the frame-work of common sense-knowledge is a birth-right which is impossible to sell."<sup>12</sup>

This explains why various objections raised against phenomenism have attracted the attention of many philosophers. The most fundamental of them is the problem of translation. It is the claim of the phenomenalist that statements about physical objects are reducible to statements about sense-data. Now, the phenomenalist can be asked the sense-datum equivalence of the statement, "there is a book on the table."

The most the phenomenalist could do in this situation is to give a description of a certain sort, that is, a recipe for making such translation

which no one could put into use. "Thee is a book on the table" would become, "there is a rectangular or red solid seeming shape on a rectangular seeming shape. Obviously, this description would not differentiate the book from any other object, say, chocolate box. To get out of this difficult, the only option is to that "there is a red rectangular book sense datum on a rectangular solid table - like object. The implication is that sense-datum vocabulary must include physical object language. Hence, no pure sense-datum report can be made. Sense-datum language must therefore be parasitic on material object language.

Given the problem of translation, phenomenism is faced with another fundamental problem. If sensing is fundamental in perception, how do we describe objects which are not perceived at given moments? According to J. S. Mill, matter is the permanent possibility of sensation.<sup>13</sup> This suggests that sense -datum statement can only be translated into mere hypothetical "If ....then" statements. The mountain exists though unperceived, is translated to "if someone were to fulfil certain perceptual conditions he would perceive the seeming mountain like object. This means that sense-datum language must be stated as a subjunctive conditional. Phenomenism is then open to the problem of counter-factual conditional. Analysis of counter factual conditional statements into synonymous indicative statements is a problem of considerable importance.<sup>14</sup> The philosophical problems which it involves are fundamental to metaphysics, epistemology and the general philosophy of science.<sup>15</sup>

Why did the phenomenalist pre-occupy himself with alternative objects of perception to those underwritten by the physical, object language? The phenomenalist holds that the only thing we really know is what appears to be the case. So, we only perceive appearances. But can we identify what appears to be the case with our sense experience? A statement of what appears to be the case is rarely a description of sense experience. It is normally a modified, guarded claim about what is the case, expressing an inclination to believe something about objects. The ostensive firmness and incorrigibility of these assertion (statements of modesty of the claim they make and not of their referring to a class of private, given entities. Statements of appearance do not express a special kind of direct knowledge by acquaintance nor are they premises from which statements about objects could be inferred. For they are not claims to knowledge at all. Rather, they are more or less tentative expressions of belief.<sup>16</sup>

This is not to say that sense datum language need not exist at all. Its introduction is desirable for two reasons. The first is to make up for a lacuna

in our inferential use of certain expressions. In this sense, it guides our sense of specific adjectives to pick out individual qualitative aspects as they are being perceived. So, to classify an item of experience as a sense-datum amounts to applying a rule of restricted reference with regard to simple descriptive terms. Secondly, the vocabulary of sense-datum marks off a portion of territory that is mostly taken for granted and not often talked about. Thus, sense-datum language is much neater than its distractingly clumsy rival (object language). It is indispensable for detailed phenomenological description.<sup>17</sup>

We can then say that phenomenism as a theory of perception only provides an account of how we verify the existence and characteristics of physical objects. We can verify that physical object exist only because we experience sense-data. This fact cannot be denied. But this is not to confuse what something is with how we know it. It is only by means of sense experience that we can know that there are physical objects. This fact does not make sentences about sense experience equivalent to sentences about sense data. We need to be aware that there are different orders of being. In the metaphysical order, that is, how things are, physical objects come before sense-data. If there were no physical objects, there would be no human beings to have sense experiences.

The epistemological order of being, however, must not commit us to the mistaken view that all that exist are sense-data. To be so committed is to be pre-occupied with perceptual experience at the expense of perceptual knowledge. This is the endemic fault of the phenomenalist. If the phenomenalist thesis is that only sense-data exists, the truth of common sense (the way we conceive the world, the character of what we experience) are enough to show that sense-data could not be conceived in any plausible analysis as the limit of what we know in perception. Therefore, the stumbling block to phenomenism is not the reality of material objects as such, but the reality of our experience. Discrete sensory particulars are not what we commonly take ourselves to be perceiving. The world of material objects is consecutive rather than momentary, cohesive rather than fragmentary, public and inter-subjective rather than private.

Equally true is the fact that we rarely use sense datum language to refer to the objects of perception. We do rarely refer to material objects by merely mentioning their qualitative aspects as they happens be perceived. We tend to favour common nouns like tables, chairs etc. Even when objects are not being presently experienced, we do refer to the perceptible aspects of them.

In our sensory experience what predominates are the kinds of items we identify as material objects rather than any inherent characteristics belonging to material objects. The recurrence and regularity of the items we experience are so pervasive that common sense applies the expression "material object" generously and without much concern for definition.

The root difficulty of phenomenism is its inadequate and unfaithful description of experience. It over emphasizes the identification of discrete sense data and ignores the frequency with which we are able to identify the items we experience as material objects. Sense-datum analysis, based on the phenomenalist claim, cannot explain to us or even justify common knowledge of the world. Sense-datum analysis must not be seen as an attempt to revise our established rules of description. Its usefulness consists only in the fact that they supplement our established rules of description. Sense-data vocabulary is nothing but mere extension of our linguistic habits which we are already familiar with. The language of sense-datum is an ancillary to our ordinary object language. It is only in this sense I view sense datum analysis as an adequate explanation of our knowledge of material objects.

#### Foot Notes

1. We must bear in mind that sense-datum analysis has often been resorted to because of a felt need to justify our ordinary judgments of perception. Our attempt to justify our knowledge of the world has produced diminished results concerning what has it is possible to know. See, for example A. J. Ayer's famous "argument from Illusion" in *The Problem of Knowledge*, Macmillan, London 1956, Chap. 3.
2. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Trans G.E. M. Ascombe, Blackwell, Oxford, 1953, para I 276, 400-1.
3. See G. Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, Hutchinson, London, 1949, p. 218.
4. See J.L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, Clarendon Press Oxford, 1962, p. 25.
5. There is need to distinguish between phenomenism and causal theory of perception. Since both of them hold that what we immediately perceive are sense data, they are phenomenal realism. However, phenomenism is phenomenal realism which is monistic. Causal theory is dualist realism.

6. See H.H. Price, **Perception**, Methuen, London, 1932, pp. 2-3.
7. A.J. Ayer in this defense of the incorrigibility of statements about sense experience holds that the only mistakes to which we are liable in making in such statements are verbal. The claim is not that sense datum report cannot be false. But in the absence of lying or some verbal error of describing, they are indubitable. They simply report what we are directly aware of in sense experience and no more. See A. J. Ayer, **The Problem of knowledge**, op. cit. Chap. 3. esp. pp. 90-95.
8. See R. J. Hirst, "The Difference Between Sensing and Observing", **Proceedings of the Aristolian Society**, Supp. vol. 28, 1954, pp. 97-240.
9. **Op. cit.**, p. 98.
10. I have in mind here the "Causal Theory of Perception" which starts from the fact of material world to the devastating conclusion that such world is unobservable. See D. M. Armstrong, **Perception and the Physical World**, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961.
11. See H. H. Price **Perception**, op.cit., p. 3
12. See G. E. Moore, "A Defence of Common sense" in **Philosophical Papers**, London, 1954, pp. 55-56.
13. See J. S. Mill **An Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy**, Longmans, London, 1865, Chaps 11 & 12
14. See Nelson Goodman, **Fact, Fiction and Forecast**, Bobbs-Merrill Co. Inc. 1965, pp. 9-25, see also the Problem of Counterfactual Conditionals "Journal of Philosophy", Vol. 44 1947, pp. 113 - 128.
15. See R. M. Chisholm, "The Contrary-to-Fact Conditional;" **Mind**, Vol. LV, No. 220 Oct. 1946, pp. 289 - 307
16. See Anthony Quinton, "The Problem of Perception," **Mind**, Vol. 64, 1953, pp. 28 - 51
17. See R. J. Hirst, **op. cit.**, pp. 120 - 124.

The Logical Positivists on science and metaphysics:  
A critique

BY

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**Introduction**

Logical positivism is the name given in 1931 to a set of philosophical ideas formulated by a set of scientists and scientifically minded individuals. The positivists were then known as the Vienna Circle. Members of the circle believed that they were championing the empirical tradition which has common features with British empiricism. This later culminated in an antimetaphysical stance. Their central interest was science and the scientific method. In the circle were such big names as Hahn (A mathematician), Otto Neurath (an economist) and Philip Frank (a physicist). There were also Moritz Schlick, Friedrich Waimann, Victor Kraft, among others.

The emergence of logical positivism as a school of thought was a landmark in the development of the philosophy of science with emphasis on methodology. The positivists see their mission as a rescue operation, saving science from all traces of metaphysics. They thus made desperate efforts to 'free' science of all metaphysical elements. Whether they succeeded in doing this is another issue altogether.

In our discussion of the thesis of positivism, we shall look at their positions on such issues as the status of metaphysics, verification principles and confirmation: the predominant concern of their methodology was to discredit metaphysics as a source of knowledge.

**(i) ATTACK ON METAPHYSICS**

The logical positivists relegated metaphysics to the background. They followed the footsteps of David Hume who dismissed metaphysics as an illusion that should be committed to the flames. HE (Hume) noted that three basic issues are involved in the acquisition of knowledge.

*These are particular precepts, empirical generalization and the mathematical constructs. Particular precepts and mathematical constructs... are certain even though the former only assure us of particular existing realities here and now. Mathematical constructs... are quite certain and evident though they do not depend on reality existing anywhere in the world.*

On this basis, Hume divided significant propositions into two classes. The first of these was formal propositions such as those of logic or pure mathematics which are held to be tautological and the second was factual propositions which are expected to be empirically verifiable. The logical positivists adopted this division. They (Logical Positivists) were also influenced by Russell's classifications of language expressions into (a) true statements, (b) false statements and (c) meaningless expressions. Bertrand Russell contends that,

*a mind, believes, truly when there is a corresponding complex not involving the mind but only its objects. This correspondence ensures truth and its absence entails falsehood.* 2

The positivists aver, obviously under the influence of the above thesis, that if a proposition did not express something formally true or false, or such a thing that can be empirically tested or verified, that such a proposition is not worth its name. Such propositions belong to the arena of metaphysics.

As Rudolf Carnap puts it,

*the positive result is worked out in the domain of empirical science, the various concepts of the various branches of science are clarified; their formal logical and epistemological connections are made explicit. In the domain of metaphysics, including all philosophy of value and normative theory, logical analysis yields the negative result that the alleged statements in this domain are entirely meaningless.* 3

Carnap believes that the elimination of metaphysics as a meaningful branch of knowledge was made possible with the development of logic and logical reasoning. He stated it clearly that the stance of the positivists on metaphysical proposition as meaningless was strict in every sense of the word. A statement can be logically false or contradictory, yet could be said to be meaningful. In a strict sense, however, a sequence of words is meaningless if it does not in every sense of language classification constitute a statement. From his analysis Carnap concludes that the alleged statements of metaphysics are in actual fact pseudo-statement.

The Positivists believe that for philosophy to become a respectable discipline like science, it must get rid of meaningless and non-sensical statements. And the only positive way to do this is to purge itself of metaphysics. They (positivists)

*thought that metaphysics had some values as an attitude toward life though its propositions did not increase human knowledge. What the positivists found objectionable was the pretension of*

*metaphysics to perform the function it could not possibly do, namely, to offer cognitive knowledge of reality.* 4

The positivists identify knowledge with science and mathematics to the exclusion of other areas such as ethics and metaphysics. Thus,

*a sentence makes a cognitively meaningful assertion and thus can be said to be either true or false only if it is either (1) analytic or self-contradictory or (2) capable at least in principle of experiential test.* 5

According to this criterion of cognitive meaning most of the formulations of traditional metaphysics and large part of epistemology are bereft of cognitive significance, no matter how veritable they may be in non-cognitive import, in view of their emotive appeal or the inspiration they offer morally.

Epistemological terminologies such as idealism or realism are equally meaningless to them. Such a concept to them is unclear. They have a similar attitude towards ethics. They shunned and despised any thought of transcendental ethics that sought to institutionalize a mode of value beyond the world of experience. Any proposition that had to do with value they dismissed as belonging to the province of the transcendental which in all its forms has no relevance to human practical life. Carnap and Ayer were particularly hostile to the propositions or assertion of ethics. Such assertions are no statements at all. We are even not making an empirical statement when we say, for instance, that stealing is bad. Such an assertion, they believe, is either the expression of our feelings about stealing - our rejection of the act - or in the alternative, an attempt to discourage others from doing the same. Thus we are not giving any scientific or empirical information when we say that stealing is wrong.

#### (ii) VERIFICATION PRINCIPLE

To appreciate the strong attack of logical positivism on traditional philosophical system, including logical atomism, it is imperative for us to understand what they meant by analytic and 'synthetic' propositions, and also the criterion they used to determine when a proposition is cognitively meaningful. The propositions that require some kind of empirical investigation before their confirmation are termed 'synthetic' whereas those whose truths follow from their meaning are called analytic. It is thus the stance of the positivists that any proposition that is significant should either be analytic or synthetic. It cannot be both. All the propositions that are analytic belong to formal logic, and as a result true by virtue of their formal

structure. Synthetic proposition<sup>5</sup>, on the other hand, are like the propositions of science. They need to be investigated empirically before their truth could be established. An analytic proposition derives its name from the fact that its predicate is contained in the definition of the subject term, the whole essence of the proposition being to assert something of the subject that is obtained by analysis of the subject term. As a result, we are able to verify such proposition by the examination of the words they contain.

Synthetic propositions can only be investigated by observation and empirical investigation, because they are derived by the joining together of two logically unrelated things. By our investigation we can establish whether this relation is true or not. The Positivists believe, however, that analytic proposition are trivial, while synthetic propositions are informative. The analytic propositions which may appear to be making references of items in the world, turn out upon analysis to be making real claim about the world. Thus they are true only by saying that they are assertions about words. In contrast synthetic propositions are informative. They make claims about reality. Thus, according to the logical Positivists, for a statement to be cognitively meaningful it must be either analytic or empirically verifiable. With the help of mathematics and logical techniques it will be easy to say that a proposition is analytic.

*By leaving aside sentences expressing analytic statements for a sentence to have 'cognitive' meaning it was held that it must express a statement that could at least in principle be shown to be true, or false, or to some degree probable, by reference to empirical observation.* <sup>6</sup>

As to when to say that a proposition is analytic, the problem has been taken care of with the help of mathematics and logical techniques. But as to when to say that a synthetic proposition is significant, that is when it purports to make assertion about the world, it has to pass a test of being empirically verified before being admitted as significant. Schlick believe that philosophy found itself in a chaotic state,

*due to the unfortunate fact that in the first place, it took certain formulations to be real questions before carefully ascertaining whether they really made any sense, and, in the second place, it believed that the answers to the questions could be found by the aid of special philosophical methods, different from those of the special sciences.* <sup>7</sup>

He believes that we cannot by philosophical analysis decide whether anything is real. This can be decided, he argues further, only by the usual

methods of daily life and of science, which is experience. The meaning of a question is clear when only we are able to state the exact conditions under which it is to be answered in the affirmative, or as it may turn out under which it is to be answered in the negative. He believes that it is quite impossible to give the meaning of any statement unless we described the facts which just have to exist, given that the statement is true. Where this fact is absent then the statement is false. Thus what determines the truth or falsity of empirically propositions according to Ayer".... is their agreement or disagreement with reality"<sup>8</sup>. Schlick strongly believes that the meaning of a proposition consists in this alone that is when it expresses a definite state of affairs. And there has to be an emphasis on this state of affairs so as to make our questions or assertions clear. Definitions help us further to understand a proposition and meaning of the words that occur in it. In a definition we state definite conditions under which a proposition is determined to be true or false. When certain data stated in a definition are found in a proposition then it is true, but where absent it is false. All these verifications of truth or falsehood of a proposition can only be possible by observation and experience which are basically features of empirical science.

The positivists made a distinction between propositions which are verified and those which are verifiable; that is between 'practical verifiability' and verifiability in principle'. If it is said, for instance, 'there are men on the 'planet mars' the proposition has not been verified by anyone but is it verifiable. We are in a position to describe steps by which we can verify it, and ascertain if there are men there. If we are able to confirm that there are men there, then our proposition is true but where otherwise it is false. Yet the proposition is significant, since we have described the conditions under which its true or falsity could be known. Though we cannot at present verify the proposition for our lack of means to travel to mars, the assertion is verifiable in principle and as such significant. If we on the other hand say that God exists in a heavenly place' there is no relevant observation we could make which would prove the falsity or the truth of the proposition. Since there is no conceivable way to verify this assertion even in principle, the sentence expresses no proposition, and as such it is not a cognitively significant statement.

On the basis of this the positivists stated that the propositions of traditional philosophy are not only false but non-sensical. They believe that the principle of verifiability negates metaphysics and whatever it stands for, and that only scientific method can actually guarantee the acquisition of

knowledge on and about the world. Experience here is inevitable as "... the question of truth or falsity can be decided only by experience, confrontation with observation - sentences." 9 When there is an agreement between our observation and prediction then we know that our proposition is right, but where there is a clash we know that it is false.

By this principle of verifiability the logical positivists were able to make a distinction between science and metaphysics, a statement is meaningful and scientific if it can be verified, meaningless and metaphysical if it cannot be verified. Verification is not the only methodology posited by the positivists. Carnap was particularly interested in testing as well as confirming propositions, hence the emergence of confirmability as one of their theses.

### (iii) CONFIRMABILITY IN SCIENCE

Carnap made a distinction between the testing of a sentence and its confirmation. According to him, we can test a sentence only if we are aware of a given procedure by which we could confirm or negate it. The confirmation thesis of the logical positivists agree with their thesis,

*that the decision about the truth or falsity of a statement can follow only the testing of a statement - a test undertaken to find whether it agrees with the experimental facts or not. 10*

To the positivists experiment is an inescapable feature of the sciences. It is through experiment that a thesis is confirmed or rejected; for this reason they see empirical testability as the criterion of scientific knowledge. Anybody of knowledge that cannot be exposed to empirical testability is a Pseudo-Science. In this procedure observation is very imperative. Our statements depend on what we have observed. Thus

*an observational statement expresses a present subjective experiment; it is a simple assertion of what presently is given to someone. Such a statement always has form: 'here' and 'now such and such'..... 11*

The words 'here' and 'now' and 'such' and 'such' are meant to emphasize the concrete situation as reported by the agent making the observation. This kind of statement loses its special meaning immediately at any point in time, it is no longer expressed within the original situation - as the world then cease from pointing at the same data. The validity of such a statement is only within the period of the experience.

Neurath and Carnap have a different conception of an observational statement (a protocol sentence). They do not see it just as an assertion, as

Schlick puts it but a report about it.

*In a protocol sentence an assertion assumes an objective form without demonstrative words. A protocol sentence reports that a certain person has made an assertion at a certain time and place.*

In a research work, this kind of objectivity is important as an easy reference could be made, and an experiment repeated. Equally, for the testing of a hypothesis or theory to take place genuinely, the knowledge of objective facts is necessary. As Kraft Points out, "statements about these, however, transcend the empirically - given because they use general concepts (whereas experiences are something unique). They always include a theory,<sup>13</sup> because they speak about objects and events of the external world."

The knowledge of the external world cannot be logically deduced from individual experiences.

Schlick has a different conception as to the status of an observation. He ascribes absolute validity to the empirical statement of an observation. The important factor here is that the experience has to be correctly recorded and reported. An assertion, he posits cannot be false, cannot be erroneous, for whoever experiences something knows it and cannot be deceived by it. "... assertion is the only statement about reality which is not hypothetical. For this reason, Schlick declared it to be the foundation of knowledge."<sup>14</sup> Thus Schlick conception of knowledge is influenced by his perception of the status of observational statements. He has faith in the power of our sensation as it relates to experiencing objects and making such known through statements - which he called observational statements. It is only such statements that can give us reality that is not hypothetical. He believes that it is only in science that we have this special feature of empiricism. He puts it thus,

*every science (in so far as we take this word to refer to the content and not to the human arrangements for arriving at it) is a system of cognition, that is, of true experiential statements. And the totality including the statements of daily life, is the system of cognitions. There is, in addition to it, no domain of 'philosophical truths! Philosophy is not a system of statements; it not is a science.<sup>15</sup>*

Thus empirical testability made possible by observation remains what demarcates scientific knowledge from extra - scientific assertions. The essence of testing hypothesis is actually to know that which is able to agree with our prediction. When a hypothesis is confirmed it means it has been

able to undergo a number of tests in addition to agreeing with our prediction. In essence, as Kraft points out "the theories which prove the most successful are just those which are in best agreement with inter subjectively consistent observation - reports."<sup>16</sup> Carnap states that though there may not be 'truth' there is confirmation. He sees truth and falsity as timelessly valid, whereas corroboration's validity is only with reference to the particular time the test was carried out and confirmed. Carnap is believed to have weakened the position of verification by the above position.

The positivists were interested in epistemological problems. All other areas of Philosophy, they assert, are inaccessible to scientific knowledge, as their propositions cannot be confirmed or rejected through the empirical scientific method.

They see traditional problems of philosophy as meaningless pseudo-problems.

*It is the task of philosophy to expose this fact and, beyond that, to clarify the concepts and sentences of science and to eliminate those discovered as being meaningless. Philosophy therefore is an activity a system of acts' not a body of knowledge of ..... true empirical sentence.*<sup>17</sup>

Thus the positivists see philosophy not as a science but as the analysis of language. Schlick goes on to express this thus,

*By means of philosophy, statements are explained, by means of science they are verified. The latter is concerned with the truth of statements the former with what they actually mean. The content soul and spirit of science is lodged naturally in what in the last analysis its statements actually mean: the philosophical activity of giving meaning is therefore the alpha and omega of all scientific knowledge.*<sup>18</sup>

This is the same as saying that philosophy supplies the foundation of science.

Because of the emphasis of the positivist on data collection, observation and experience are indispensable to scientific investigation. As a consistent observation of phenomenon takes place over a period of time an inductive generalisation is made. The system adopted by the positivists, as far as scientific research is concerned, agrees with the inductive method; as induction, observation, collecting of data and a subsequent generalisation fit into their requirement of science. Imre Lakatos stresses this point when he said "according to inductivism only these propositions can be accepted

not the body of science which either describe hard facts or are infallible inductive generalisation.... "19 Knowledge obtained through this process they believe, is reliable.

The foundation of knowledge in science is located no where except in experience, they believe, The knowledge that comes from experience has a solid foundation that can hardly be faulted. That which is given in experience constitutes the absolute foundation of knowledge. Weimar also perceives perceptual experience as "... that .... taken to be self-authenticating and therefore as a foundation that is not in need of further foundation." <sup>20</sup>

The assumption is that the factual basis from where the observation language in science is constituted is derived from perceptual experience. To the positivists, reality is the exclusive preserve of scientific phenomena.

#### CRITICAL EVALUATION

The thesis of logical positivism as it relates to science, metaphysics and philosophy has generated a lot of controversies. The first impression one gets from their thesis is that whatever we can say, or could be said, is reducible to elementary statements. In this case, as Anyanwu points out, "all abstract scientific statements and hypothesis are ultimately short hand descriptions of observable events" <sup>21</sup>. This assumption cannot be sustained. It is not possible to translate all statement about physical objects into statement about sense data. Such a practice is not feasible. In science there are a number of assumptions that cannot be reduced into sense experience. A hypothesis may derive support from other things other than the experiences from sense data. As Hempel rightly argued,

*the support that may be claimed for a hypothesis need not all be of the inductive - evidential kind.... It need not consist entirely or even partly-of data that bear out test implication derived from it. Support may also come from above that is from more inclusive hypothesis or theories, that imply the given one and have independent evidential support.* <sup>22</sup>

He gave an example with the hypothetical fall on the moon, which was reached without any checking of its implication experimentally on the moon. Its strong support come inductively from Newton's theory of gravitation and of motion in conjunction with the information that the radius and the mass of the moon are 272 and 0123; that the gravitational acceleration near the surface of the earth is 32.2 feet per second. <sup>23</sup>

It is really puzzling that the positivists laid a lot of emphasis on observation without qualification. They were even carried away to the

extent that they saw all knowledge from experience and observation as valid. In laying emphasis on observation they were not careful enough to free science from the charge of being subjective. There is the need for us to make a distinction between objective science on one hand and our knowledge on the other. We could be aware of facts by observation, but the interpretation given to this is really what matters: the experiences that has realised from this could subjectively or objectively interpreted. If an observer says, for instance, that this is a raven and points to a bird in front of him, this could be seen as observation statement, which was produced by the observer because of the impression, semantics and perception he had. As Feyerabed (who incidentally gave the above instance says the sentence made above is not about impression, it is rather about a bird which is neither a sensation nor the behaviour of some sentient being. In the same vein, argues Feyerabend,

*it may be admitted that the observation sentences which a scientific observer produces are prompted by his impression. However their content will again be determined, not by these impressions, but by the entities allegedly described.*<sup>24</sup>

Thus the emphasis on observation should be on the interpretation given to experience which really determines its objectivity.

There are, besides many approaches to the study of Science. To restrict the method of science to what we just observe or experiences empirically will definitely not be in the interest of science. If it is said that science starts and ends in the laboratory we have to explain what we mean, its extent and scope. It is difficult to carry on with the enterprise of science without our reason. Thus observation, experiment, reasoning are all essential features of science. As Sir George Thompson pointed out,

*some sciences are observational such as for example, astronomy where apart from the moon, no one has yet seriously tried to set into action forces in the objects observed. On the other hand you have the experimental science of physics which might in some respects be regarded as rather similar but in which it is possible to make laboratory experiments under carefully controlled conditions.*<sup>25</sup>

Some sciences too are equally mathematical which have to do more with reason than observation and experiment. Even though we may concede the fact that before a hypothesis is verified that there is the need for experiment and observation, it has to be noted that observation in science is not as simple as the positivists want us to believe, and it does not as had already been

pointed out, exhaust scientific enterprise. Besides it needs to be made very clear, if an observation can just take place apriori in science. As Nagel and Cohen state 'even apparently random' observation requires the use of hypothesis to interpret 'what it is we are sensing. We can claim indeed that we 'see the fixed stars, the earth eclipsing the,

*moon, bees gathering nectar for honey, or a storm approaching.  
But we shall be less ready to maintain that we simply and literally  
see these things unaided by any theory, if we remember how  
comparatively recent in human history are these explanation of  
what it is we see.*<sup>26</sup>

They argued that except we identify observation with an immediate ineffable experience we just need to employ hypotheses even in observation: for the objects of our seeing, hearing and so on have meaning for us only when we are able to link up what is directly given in experience with what are not objects of perception classified in view of the similarities between them. Such similarities are these that are known to be significant basically as a result of the theory we hold. It is for the reason that a whale is rated as a mammal, not fish despite certain superficial resemblances that exist between whales and fish.

Observation can be erroneous. There is thus the need to note the conditions under which observation are made; if such are not to be rendered unreliable and worthless. Observations in science especially is not a very casual affair. As Cohen and Nagel noted too,

*all but primitive observation are carried on with the aid of  
specially devised instruments. The nature and limitations of such  
instruments must be known. Thus readings must be corrected and  
interpreted in the light of a comprehensive theoretical system.*<sup>27</sup>

The logical positivists just kept on harping on observations, unmindful of how subjective such could be, and how observation can really be an asset to scientific research. They also failed to take special notice of the fact pointed out by Reichenbach that "... the empiricist principle includes the application of mathematics to physical reality."<sup>28</sup>

The distinction that the positivists made between science and philosophy and the criteria they applied in doing this are unconvincing, and so is their assault on metaphysics. Their criterion for meaningfulness is definitely unacceptable. Empirical tests as demanded by them do not exhaust what is meaningful. Some critics have even point out, as Anyanwu confessed,

*that the verification principle of the logical positivists is not itself subject to verification. They point out that in the way people use the word 'meaning' metaphysical statements are meaningful. In fact the verification principle was not established as a result of an empirical investigation hence one wonders if the principle is not a metaphysical one.*<sup>29</sup>

Besides, their reference to experiences as criterion for confirmation of a hypothesis leaves much to be desired. They did not in making this assertion consider the fact that sense experience is private, and that it will be absurd to reduce the cognitive meaning of experience to pure privacy.

Their stance on metaphysics is rooted on superficiality and parochialism. Metaphysics is part and parcel of life. As Philip Frank points out it (metaphysics) is "..... of the highest value for human life." <sup>30</sup> Metaphysics cannot be divorced from science. Interpretations in science go beyond the observable, and this is nothing but its metaphysical features. And the "Metaphysical Interpretation of science.... is a search for the reality behind the physical phenomena"<sup>31</sup> In buttressing his point Frank quoted the famous statement of a German Physicist Max Planck who believed strongly in the metaphysics interpretation of science. He (Planck) said

*every physical theory contain two types of terms - the terms denoting sense observation (red, warm...) and the symbols forming the general principles (potential, force...). The positivists, according to Planck, argue that beyond these two realms of concepts nothing can be said about metaphysical science, but the adherents of a metaphysical interpretation assume... 'physical reality' behind the symbols and behind the sense observations.*<sup>32</sup>

There is no way sense observations can exhaust what there is in an object. To everything that we experience there is a metaphysical reality behind it. When we are able to appreciate the analogy of doctrines then the process of the acquisition of metaphysical knowledge will be clear, for instance, the physical law of conservation is in consonance with the metaphysical law that it is impracticable for something to become nothing and vice versa.

As Frank points out, in the physical theories and formulation by differential equation, method of integration is capable of enabling us to predict and to handle phenomena, but does not give us understanding. The alternative left is to resort to metaphysics for interpretation. This is because 'behind the phenomena and the equation' there is in existence the real world

and to describe this reality we apply analogy that makes use of everyday language. And, in fact, physical phenomena are nothing more than mental occurrence. Thus the "so-called metaphysical interpretations of science have been attempts to make the general and abstract principle of science more intelligible."<sup>33</sup> Those abstract principles of science are interpreted in the language of metaphysics that is close to the language of common sense.

Aristotle appreciated the close link between philosophy and science and state that the two are nearly the same. Our investigation, he believes, starts naturally from what is easily knowable and more evident to us. From there we proceed to what is self-evident and intrinsically more intelligible. We proceed this way for it is a part fulfillment for something to be knowable to us and another for it to be objectively intelligible. The interpretation of things metaphysical is meant to be self-evident and intrinsically clear and should be based on objectively intelligible principles.

Metaphysics occupies a very dominant position in man's life which makes its import on science very prominent. As Edward Brutt points out there is no way man can escape from metaphysics: the only escape man has from metaphysics is for him to avoid saying something. But man is always anxious to go beyond what he knows and understands, the forces that influence his life. The knowledge of metaphysics is inevitable for this and

*since human nature demands metaphysics for its intellectual satisfaction, no great mind can wholly avoid playing with ultimate questions especially where they are powerfully thrust upon it by consideration arising from its positivists investigations, or by certain vigorous extra-scientific interests such as religion.<sup>34</sup>*

Even Newton in all his attempts to avoid metaphysics could not be successful. He (Newton) was not in love with hypothesis that is explanatory propositions which were not immediately deducible from phenomena. Despite his position, he found himself following his illustrious predecessors and gave answers or assumed answers; to such fundamental questions as the nature of space, time and matter, the relation of man with the objects of his knowledge and it is just such answers that constitute metaphysics."<sup>35</sup> In the absence of making a number of assumption about the cosmos, assumptions that are obviously metaphysical, a researcher, especially in Physics and astronomy cannot make reasonable advancement.

It is thus difficult for us to accept the distinction made between natural science and philosophy by the positivists, even to the extent of diminishing the status of philosophy in general and metaphysics in particular. It is amazing to think that science which emerged from philosophy should be

used to destroy philosophy. The true situation is perhaps Descartes' comparison of philosophy to a tree, as noted by Frank. The roots are metaphysics, the trunk is physics, and the fruits on the branches are applied Science, Medicine, Mechanics and Ethics.<sup>36</sup>

This analogy represents the relationship between, Philosophy, Science and Metaphysics and as Weimer equally noted.

*Philosophy at one time or another has been the mother of virtually all intellectual disciplines including the physical sciences and the nascent psychological science. In most cases the birth pangs have been traumatic with the mother jealously trying to retain sovereignty... and the offspring childishly distantiating itself from its intellectual heritage.<sup>37</sup>*

He (Weimer) went further to assert that philosophy and the sciences in their present form enrich one another, as their relationship is symbiotic. By this statement one can see how shaky the position of the positivists is as it relates to philosophy in general and metaphysics in particular and how hollow their criteria of determining what constitutes science is.

Obviously the brand of science the positivists were out to promote is obsolete. It is close to impossibility to reduce modern science to mere observation, or hope to achieve absolute certainty in scientific research.

Heisenberg's principle of indeterminacy that "there is a certain amount of inherent uncertainty in our Universe"<sup>38</sup> emphasizes this point. In the spirit of this principle we do not always expect to measure things precisely, for instance we cannot tell exactly where an electron will be in an atom. This entails "some randomness to events in nature."<sup>39</sup> This principle which is especially crucial in sub atomic physics has given scientists a lot of concerns but none has "disproved (the) principle that there is a certain amount of inherent uncertainty in our nature."<sup>40</sup> All this makes metaphysical principles inevitable in scientific endeavor.

It is to be remarked however that the positivists were in their divorce of metaphysics from science influenced by the conventional practice of science at the time they wrote. At this point in time scientists were not given to assuming any principle about reality or the universe and were in agreement with Kuhn's thesis applied to existing scientific paradigms. Nonetheless it is to be noted that every scientific paradigm, or major scientific theory made an assumption about the universe or reality. And this assumption about the universe or reality is invariably a metaphysical principle. This is the point the positivists did not give serious thought to, hence it is easy to dislodge their stand-point.

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## ARE MIRACLES POSSIBLE?

### A Critical Examination of Hume's Arguments Against Miracles

DR. J. I. OMOREGBE

The great contribution of Hume to empiricism is that HE brought it to its logical conclusion thereby showing both its strength as well as its weakness. The consequence of Hume's empiricism are serious for the theoretical scientist. For by his critical analysis of the principles of causality and that of the uniformity of nature, Hume uncovered the weakness of the inductive method on which modern science is based. No matter how many times an event happened in the past, says Humes, there is no proof that it will repeat itself in the future, even under similar circumstances. That nature is uniform is an assumption which cannot be validly demonstrated. No intrinsic link can be observed or validity demonstrated between an event and a cause. Therefore that every event necessarily has a cause is an assumption which cannot be demonstrated and is not within the scope of our empirical observation. All we observe and can observe are succession of events. We do not observe any intrinsic link between them. Strict necessity and universality are not within the scope of our empirical observation. We may have observed in the past that B generally followed A. But we did not and cannot observe any intrinsic link between them. In other words, we did not and cannot observe A causing B. We may assume that since B always followed A in the past, from our observation, it will in all probability also follow A in the future so that whenever we see A we can expect B to follow. But this is only an assumption which cannot be proved, nor can the assertion be made with certainty. We cannot say that B must always and necessarily follow A in the future because it did so in the past.

It is the contention of this paper that Hume's a prior denial of the possibility of miracles is inconsistent with his critical analysis of the principle of causality and the uniformity of nature. We shall come to this later; first let us see his arguments against miracles. His treatment of miracles is in section x, "of Miracles", in his **An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding**.

Hume defines a miracle as "a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity or by the interposition of some invisible agent."<sup>1</sup> Thus a miracle is by its very nature "a violation of the laws of nature."<sup>2</sup> This means that by its very nature a miracle is contrary to the

natural course of things. If an event is in line with the normal course of nature, Hume says, it is not considered as a miracle. Thus, if for example, a man dies suddenly, it would not be a miracle. But if a dead man were to rise again and come back to life, that would be a miracle, because it is contrary to the natural course of things, and contrary to human experience "There must therefore be a uniform experience against every miraculous events, other wise the event would not merit that appellation".

Hume links the concept of laws of nature with human experience for it is human experience, he says that establishes the laws of nature and he argues that the uniform experience of mankind all over the world and in all ages is 'infallible'<sup>3</sup>. Any conclusion based on this "infallible" human experience enjoys the highest degree of certainty." And as a uniform experience amounts to a proof, there is here a direct and full proof, from the nature of fact against the existence of any miracles nor can such a proof be destroyed, or the miracle rendered credible but by an opposite proof which is superior".<sup>4</sup> But for Hume, no proof can be superior to that of the collective human experience which is infallible and irrefutable. It follows therefore according to Hume, that 'no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle unless the testimony be of such a kind that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it tries to establish."<sup>5</sup>

*When anyone tells me, that he saw a dead man restored to life, I immediately consider with myself, whether it be more probable that this person should either deceive or be deceived, or that the fact, which he relates, should really have happened. I weigh the one miracles against the other; and according to the superiority which I discover, I pronounce my decision, and always reject the greater miracle.<sup>6</sup>*

What, in other words, Hume is saying in the above-quoted passage is this: If somebody tells me he has witnessed a miracle (for example, that he saw a dead man rise again to life) I would ask myself: Is it not possible that this man is under an illusion or he is deliberately trying to deceive me? Would it be a miracle for this man to be under an illusion or for him to deliberately try to deceive me? Is that not possible? Would it be a miracle? Even if such would be a miracle, would it be a greater miracle than that of a dead man rising again? Certainly not. It is therefore more likely to be the case that this man is either under an illusion or is deliberately trying to deceive me. If this would be a miracle it would certainly be a lesser miracle than that of a dead man rising again, which would be a greater miracle. The greater miracle (that a dead man rose again) is therefore to be rejected in

favour of the lesser miracle, namely, that this man is either under an illusion or is trying to deceive me. In this way, Hume contends, we shall see that no testimony is enough to establish the credibility of any miracle. It will always be found to be the case that anybody who claims to have witnessed a miracle is either under an illusion or he is intentionally trying to deceive, as a means, for examples of propagating his religion. The testimony of mankind (i.e. the collective experience of mankind) is always greater and always outweighs the testimony of one man or a group of people who claim to have witnessed a miracle. It is the testimony of mankind as a whole that has established the laws of nature and any claim or testimony by particular individuals which goes counter to this is to be rejected. Hence any claim of miracle is *a priori* to be rejected as false.

Hume goes on to advance other arguments against the reality of miracles. He says claims of miracles are generally made by people whose education, learning and good sense are not unquestionable so that such claims are always the results of delusion. According to Hume, there has been no case in history of a miracle attested to "by a sufficient number of men of such unquestioned good sense, education, and learning, as to secure us against all delusion in themselves, of such undoubted integrity as to place them beyond all suspicion of any design to deceive others."<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, Hume continues, there is a natural tendency in man to be attracted by stories of unusual occurrences. This 'passion for surprise and wonder' inherent in human nature is exploited by religious people who indulge in telling fantastic stories of miraculous occurrences to promote the cause of their religious beliefs. "A religionist may be an enthusiast, and imagine he sees what has no reality; he may know his narrative to be false, and yet persevere in it, with the best intention in the world for the sake of promoting so holy a cause."<sup>8</sup> When we take these two facts (i.e. the fact of man's passion, for surprise and wonder, and the fact that religious people are only too eager to take advantage of this, to promote the cause of their religious) into consideration the credibility of any claim of miracle becomes seriously in doubt "and human testimony in these circumstances lose all pretensions to authority". Besides, claims of miraculous occurrences are generally made "among ignorant and barbarous nations". And if such claims are made among civilized people it is only because they have inherited such superstitious beliefs from their "ignorant and barbarous ancestors, who transmitted them with that inviolable sanction and authority which always attend received opinions."<sup>9</sup> Hume further argues that different religions which teach contradictory doctrines and make mutually

exclusive claims about themselves support their doctrines and claims with miracles". Since the doctrines and claims of these religions are contradictory and mutually exclusive the supportive "miracles" of one religion eliminate those of others, for if one is true the other must be false.

Hume recalls the numerous miracles said to have taken place in France at the tomb of a famous Jansenist, "with whose sanctity the people were so long deluded." The curing of the sick, giving hearing to the deaf, and sight to the blind, etc were reported to be "the usual effect of that holy sepulchre". "Where such reports... fly about, the solution to the phenomenon is obvious: and we judge in conformity to regular experience and observation when we account for it by the known and natural principles of credulity and delusion."<sup>10</sup> Such reports or claims should be rejected as the product of delusion because they are contrary to "the most established laws of nature."<sup>11</sup>

Thus all claims of miraculous occurrences are, according to Hume to be rejected a priori as the product of delusion. The collective experience of mankind has established the laws of nature and the collective experience (or in other words, the testimony) of mankind as a whole always outweighs that of anybody (or group of people) who claim to have witnessed a miracle. i.e., the violation of these laws. "Therefore," Hume concludes, "we shall establish it as a maxim, that no human testimony can have such force as to prove a miracle."<sup>12</sup>

Now, are these views of Hume consistent with his analysis of the principle of causality and the uniformity of nature? In his arguments against the possibility or the reality of miracles, Hume, as we have seen, talks of the laws of nature as well-established and inviolable. Any claims that implies the violation of these laws should, a priori, be rejected as the product of delusion. But is it legitimate to talk of inviolable laws of nature within the context of Hume's empiricism? Is such a concept of the laws of nature not a metaphysical concept which is outside the scope of man's empirical experience? There is, according to Hume, no intrinsic connection between a cause and an effect nor can an effect be discovered in a cause. "In a word then every effect is a distinct event from its cause".<sup>13</sup> Therefore the idea that every event must have a cause is an assumption which is not implied in the concept of event and no necessary connection can be observed between an event and its cause. All we observe and can observe according Hume, is succession of events without any intrinsic connection between them. The idea of strict necessity or universality is outside the scope of our empirical experience. The fact that we observed in the past that A was

followed by B does not mean that whenever there is A, B must necessarily follow. Yet we have formed the habit of expecting B whenever we see A just because we observed that B followed A in the past. "What we have found once to follow from an object, we conclude will for ever follow from it."<sup>14</sup> We are thereby making the past standard for the future. But there is no rational justification for that. We assume that the future will resemble the past or in other words that nature is uniform. But this is outside the scope of our empirical experience. It is this assumption which prompts us to make the past the standard for the future. "First we may observe that the supposition that the future resembles the past, is not founded on arguments of any kind, but is derived entirely from habit by which we are determined to expect for the future the same train of objects to which we have been accustomed".<sup>15</sup> No matter how many times we may have observed B follow A in the past, that is not a guarantee that the same thing will happen in the future since there is no necessary connection between them. "From the mere repetition of any past impression, even to infinity, there never will arise any new original idea such as that of a necessary connection; and the number of impressions has in this case no more effect than if we confined ourselves to one only."<sup>16</sup> Hume insists that we cannot make any inference or draw any conclusion from such a repetition. Hume's analysis shows that scientific truths are not demonstrably certain because they are based on the assumption that the future will resemble the past, that nature is uniform, that things known to have repeatedly produced the same effects in the past will, under the same conditions produce the same effects any time in the future. This assumption implies the ideas of strict necessity and universality in things. But Hume says "necessity is something that exists in the mind, not in objects".<sup>17</sup> There is no guarantee that the future will resemble the past, that what happened in the past will repeat itself in the future. This has serious consequences for the concept of the laws of nature, a fact which eluded Hume. In the light of Hume's analysis, the laws of nature can no longer be regarded as absolute and inviolable laws stating what have always happened in the past and will always happen in the future. Rather, the laws of nature become statements of what have repeatedly happened in the past with no implication that the same events will necessarily occur in the future. The most that can be derived from past observations, Hume says, is probability, not certainty. For the repetition of the same occurrence in the past can "never occasion any belief of assurance."<sup>18</sup> And "to every probability", Hume points out, "there is an opposite possibility" Hume writes:

*Let man be once fully persuaded of these two principles, that there is nothing in any object, considered in itself, which can afford us*

*a reason for drawing a conclusion beyond it, and, that even after  
the observation of the frequent or constant conjunction of objects,  
we have no reason to draw any inference concerning any object  
beyond those of which we have experience.*<sup>19</sup>

Now if, as Hume says, we do not observe strict necessity in objects, if the idea of necessity is only in the mind and not in things and if we are not entitled to draw conclusions beyond what we observe, how can the idea of inviolable laws of nature be justified? Does this not involve drawing conclusions beyond what is observable? The a priori impossibility of miracle derives, according to Hume, from the fact that its concept involves the violation of the well-established laws of nature. "A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and an unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of fact, is as entire as any argument from experience possibly be imagined."<sup>20</sup> But a firm and unalterable experience cannot, on Hume's terms, establish that the future will resemble the past, or that there is a necessary connection between two events. And since the laws of nature were established by human empirical experience these laws cannot tell us how things will be in the future but only how they have been observed to be in the past. In the light of this, no a priori argument can be validly brought against the logical possibility of miracles. We cannot even talk of the violation of the laws of nature since these laws, derived as they are from human empirical experience, do not involve necessity or necessary connection. They do not in the light of Hume's analysis state what will always happen but what have been observed to happen in the past. Thus, for example, the laws of nature, on Hume's terms, do not state that dead men can never rise again (for this would involve strict necessity which is beyond the scope of man's empirical experience) but that men known to have died in the past did not rise again. And since we are not entitled to use the past as a standard for the future and there is no proof that the future will resemble the past we are not entitled to say with certainty that in future dead men will not rise again to life. If tomorrow a dead man rises again to life, the laws of nature have not been violated.

In fact, on Hume's terms, it would be inappropriate to talk of their violation for the reasons explained above.

Hume's first argument against the possibility of miracles can thus be seen as misleading. Even his very definition of miracle as "a violation of the laws of nature" is inconsistent with his empirical principle, for his concept of laws of nature (involving as it does the idea of necessity) is

metaphysical rather than empirical. Hume's first argument presupposes that there is a conflict between the laws of nature and the claim of the man who says he has witnessed a miracle. Hume presents it as a conflict between the laws of nature supported by the experience of mankind and their purported violation supported by the evidence of one man. Hume says the evidence of mankind always outweighs that of one man and that the latter should therefore be rejected. But there is no such conflict, from the view point of Hume's empirical principle. What the laws of nature say, in the light of Hume's analysis is that in the past it was repeatedly observed that dead men did not rise again, while the man who claims to have witnessed a miracle says that he observed an isolated case in which a dead man rose again. Now so long as the laws of nature remain within the scope of man's empirical experience in line with Hume's empiricism, and do not say that dead men can never rise again, there is no conflict between what they say and what the man who claims to have witnessed a miracle says. No argument can be validly employed, on the basis of Hume's empiricism to disprove such a claim a priori. If we are told that what happened repeatedly yesterday did not happen today (even though it was expected to happen) we can have no valid argument against such a claim, on the basis of Hume's empiricism. The fact that we experienced it repeatedly yesterday is no proof that it will happen again tomorrow. Hume himself points out the limitation of experience.

*Though experience be our only guide in reasoning concerning matter of fact, it must be acknowledge, that this guide is not altogether infallible, but in some cases is apt to lead us into errors.<sup>21</sup>*

Hume is therefore compelled by the logic of this empiricism to accept the logical possibility of miracles. An a priori refutation of miracles as an impossibility is inconsistent with his empiricism.

Hume's other arguments are even weaker than his first argument. His second argument, viz; that it is generally people with poor education that claim to have witnessed miracles, is meant to show that belief in miracles is due to ignorance or lack of education. This may well be true in some, or even many, cases. But Hume himself was aware of cases where highly intelligent and learned men, like the Jesuits, have attested to the occurrence of miracles. Hume gives the example of series of miracles claimed to have occurred in France at the tomb of a certain Jansenist, reputed to have been a holy man while he was alive. "The curing of the sick, giving hearing to the deaf, and sight to the blind, were everywhere talked of as the usual

effects of that holy sepulchre".<sup>22</sup> Now, among those who attested to the actual occurrence of these miracles were, according to Hume, some Jesuits. He acknowledged that the he suits are "a learned body". "And what have we to oppose to such a cloud of "witnesses...?" Hume asks. In other words, what argument can we use to refute such a claim attested to by this kind of witnesses? "The absolute impossibility or miraculous nature of the events", Hume claims is enough argument against their actual occurrence. "And this surely in the eyes of all reasonable people, will alone be regarded as a sufficient refutation."<sup>23</sup> Having acknowledged the Jesuits to be learned men, Hume saw the weakness of his second argument. He then resorted to "the absolute impossibility of miracles". His argument here is that miracles are absolutely impossible and since the events claimed to have occurred at the tomb of the Jansenist are of miraculous nature, that alone is enough to show that they did not actually occur. And he is quite convinced that "all reasonable people" will agree with him that this is a "a sufficient refutation". But Hume fails to show us why miracles are absolutely impossible and how he can reconcile this view of his with the concept of the laws of nature derived from his analysis of the principle of causality. That miracles are impossible is therefore a gratuitous assertion devoid of any rational demonstration.

Hume's claim that religious people are usually prepared to tell lies in order to propagate their religion may be true in some cases. Some religious people may be prepared to do that. But it would be both false and unfair to say that all religious people are dishonest and are prepared to tell lies as a means of propagating their faith. Finally, Hume claims that it is "a strong presumption against all supernatural and miraculous relations, that they are observed chiefly to abound among ignorant and barbarous nations".<sup>24</sup> Hume seems to be telling us here that it is only among ignorant and uncivilized people that we hear of miracles occurring, which confirms his view that belief in miracles is due to ignorance. But even in the most civilized and most learned societies today, like those of America and Europe, there are reports of miraculous cures performed by preachers, evangelists or prophets. These miraculous cures are reported to occur during public prayers, sermons, or "fellowship" gathering, American preachers and evangelists conduct "miracle, crusades" during which miracles are reported to occur. Yet neither the American nation nor the European nations today can be called "ignorant and barbarous nations". But claims of miracles abound in them.

Hume, like anyone else, is free to believe or not to believe in the actual

occurrence of a miracle in any given instance where it is claimed to have occurred. He has, however, failed to show that miracles are *a priori* impossible. Nor has he shown why it is **unreasonable** to accept the evidence of anyone who claims to have experienced or witnessed a miracle. In fact if there is any philosophy of nature which supports the possibility of miracles, it is that of Hume.<sup>25</sup> The logical possibility of miracles is, of course, one thing, while their actual occurrence is another. The point here, however, is that once the logical possibility is admitted, no *a priori* argument can then be used against their actual occurrence. Every given claim of their actual occurrence will then have to be examined on its own merit and acceptance or rejection of such a claim will depend on the strength or weakness of the empirical evidences. This article is not intended to be an apologetic for religion, but to draw attention to the necessity of accepting the logical consequences of our fundamental point of departure. If we find we cannot accept such logical consequences then we either reject our premise or throw logic and consistency to the winds. But once we have accepted the premises we are logically compelled to accept the consequences.

A miracle is an unusual occurrence which defies any scientific explanation in terms of the known laws of nature. To deny the logical possibility of such occurrences is to claim a comprehensive and thorough knowledge of nature. The continuous advancement of science shows the limitation of man's knowledge of nature at any given time. Modern science is still relatively young, but it continues to grow and to increase man's understanding of nature. Man lives in a universe which he does not yet fully understand but which he is continuously trying to understand by means of science. At no point in history was mankind ever in a position to claim a comprehensive and thorough understanding of the workings of nature and it is unlikely that mankind will ever have such a thorough understanding of nature in the foreseeable future. This limitation in man's understanding of the workings of nature leaves room for the possibility of certain unusual occurrences which cannot be scientifically explained in terms of known laws of nature. Thus to deny the possibility of miracles is to deny any limitation in man's understanding of the workings of nature, and to accept the possibility of miracles is to acknowledge limitation in man's knowledge of nature.<sup>26</sup>

However since man's knowledge of nature continues to expand thanks to the continuous growth of modern science it is obvious that certain unusual occurrence which, today, are inexplicable scientifically could be scientifi-

cally explained tomorrow. In other words it is possible, and indeed very likely, that the science of tomorrow will be able to explain certain things which the science of today is unable to explain just as the science of today has been able to explain certain things which the science of yesterday was unable to explain. This means that some of the occurrences which, today, are miracles may turn out tomorrow to be no miracles at all.

If however a miracle is defined, or understood, as an unusual occurrence brought about by a **divine intervention**, then it becomes impossible to establish empirically that any given occurrence is in fact a miracle since it is impossible to show conclusively that any occurrence was **actually** brought about by a **divine intervention**.<sup>27</sup> A person could say he believes that a given unusual occurrence was caused to happen by a **divine intervention**. Such a person would be expressing a belief or, in other words, making an act of faith, but he would be unable to demonstrate conclusively that the event in question was actually brought about by a divine intervention. To call an occurrence a **miracle** therefore means to express a belief, that is, to make an act of faith, the truth of which cannot be conclusively established. Thus when understood or defined as an occurrence brought about by a **divine intervention**, the concept of miracle passes from the empirical realm to the realm of faith. But even when they are understood in this sense, miracles remain at least logical possibilities just as the existence of God remains a logical possibility. The same applied to the occurrence of miracles understood as an act of divine positive intervention in human affairs. Since the days of kant, it has become virtually an axiom in Philosophy that the existence of God cannot be **conclusively proved**. Thus it can neither be conclusively proved that God exists or that he does not exist. No argument on either side can be conclusive. What this means is that the existence of God remains an open question, a logical possibility, but no more than a possibility. An argument intended to prove that this logical possibility is actually a reality (that is, that God actually exists) is doomed to failure right from the start, just as any argument intended to prove that God cannot possibly exist is also doomed to failure right from the start. This leaves room for the intelligibility of faith as well as for the intelligibility of atheism. Since it cannot be proved conclusively that God does not or cannot exist it is therefore not unreasonable for a person to believe that he exists. To say that God exists is to express a belief, that is, to make an act of faith and it is quite intelligible and legitimate to hold such a belief since it cannot be disproved. On the other hand to say that God does not exist is also to express a belief which is also quite intelligible and legitimate since atheism too cannot be disproved. Thus both the theist as well as the atheist

are believers (since each expresses a belief); the former is a believer in the existence of God while the latter is a believer in God's non-existence. None of them can prove his position but simply believes it without conclusive proof.

The same applies to miracle understood as acts of divine positive intervention in the universe. The man who says miracles do actually occur, that certain occurrence are actually brought about by divine intervention expresses a belief, the truth of which he cannot prove. On the other hand, the man who (like Hume) says miracles are a priori impossible also expresses a belief, the truth of which he cannot conclusively prove. Hume's arguments intended to prove the truth of his position are, as we have seen, inconclusive. Thus, whether a miracle is defined simply as an usual occurrence inexplicable scientifically in terms of known scientific laws, or as an usual occurrence brought about by divine intervention, the question "Are miracles possible?" has to be answered positively since their a priori impossibility cannot be conclusively established. Thus miracles are in principle possible.<sup>28</sup>

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26. Alastair mckinnon has argued along a similar line: If an usual event(a miracle) is convincingly attested to as having actually occurred contrary to a known law of physics, this would mean that the formulation of that law is inaccurate or mistaken and it would need to be reformulated to accommodate the possibility of the usual event in question - see Alastair mckinnon, "Miracle and paradox" in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, iv(1967)308-314
27. See Richard swinburne, *The Concept of Miracle*, London: Macmillan, 1970,p.20
28. For more discussion of miracles see Patrick Nowell-Smith, "Miracles" in *Hibbert Journal*, vilvii (1950) 354-60; R.F. Holland, "The Miraculous" in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, ii(1965) 43-51; Paul Dietti, "On Miracles" in *American Philosophical V*(1968)130-134; Antony Flew, *God and Philosophy*, London: Hutchinson, 1966. ch.7

## BOOK REVIEW

**TITLE:** A Simplified History of Western Philosophy (3 Volumes)  
Volume 1 - Ancient and Medieval Philosophy (198 pages)  
Volume 2 - Modern Philosophy (177 pages)  
Volume 3 - Contemporary Philosophy (156 pages)

**AUTHOR:** Joseph Omoregbe  
**PUBLISHERS:** Joja Educational Research and Publishers Limited  
**YEAR:** 1991  
**PRICE:** Not stated  
**REVIEWER:** Karo Oghinaka.

The most widely read books on the 'History of Philosophy' in this part of the world and particularly in Nigeria are Bertrand Russell's **History of Western Philosophy** published in 1961 and Frederick Copleston's **A History of Philosophy** (9 Volumes) published between 1964 and 1974. The former is most known to our philosophical audience. Unfortunately, they are a rare academic commodities on our bookstores and library shelves today.

There is a rare fame and prestige any good book on the History of Philosophy bestows on its author. For example, in spite of the fact that Bertrand Russell wrote over a hundred books, and is most remembered by his professional colleagues for his contributions in the areas of logic, epistemology, philosophies of science and mathematics, his **History of Philosophy** is the most famous, and widely read of all his books. Although it does not rank as high, in terms of contribution to Human knowledge, as his hard-core philosophical texts like **Principia Mathematical**, **Our knowledge of the External World**, **The Problems of Philosophy**, and a few others, yet it remains the most popular.

Such respect and fame are attached to books that cover this field that G.M. Trevelyan wrote of Russell's **History of Philisophy** that "it is certain of a very wide audience, and is, in my opinion, just the kind of thing people ought to have to make them understand the past ..... It may be one of the most valuable of books of our time .....". Sir Julian Huxley also believed that Russell's book "should be widely read" and A.L. Rowse stated of the book and author respectively: "alive in every nerve .... a masterpiece of intellectual energy ..... the Socrates of our time."

Joseph Omoregbe will as well emerge, with this three volumes, as the Bertrand Russell of our time. G.W.F. Hegel, E. Brehir, J.E. Erdman, S.E. Stumpf, C.J. Webb and a few others (along with their books on the history of philosophy) have continued to enjoy similar status.

The contents of this three volume masterpiece would interest, apart from the philosophy audience, the political scientist (in the following thinkers, Plato, Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas, Francis Suarez, Marsilio of Padua, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Rousseau, Locke, Hegel, Marx, John Rawls, etc); the scientist (in, the Early Greek Philosophers, Pythagoras, the atomists, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Karl Popper, etc.).

Others who are bound to find the texts a worthy companion include lawyers and legal philosophers, moral philosophers, theologians, metaphysicians, psychologists and sociologists. Volume one, **Ancient and Medieval Philosophy**, treats at least Forty-one philosophers/schools. Part one of the book is on Ancient philosophy that starts with Thales (600 BC) and ends with Boethius (A.D. 480); Part Two treats Medieval philosophy starting with John Scotus Eriugena (AD 810) and ends with Niccolo Machiavelli (1469 - 1527) the great Italian Political Philosopher.

Volume Two, **Modern Philosophy**, treats at least twenty philosophers and schools of thought. It starts with Francis Bacon (1561 - 1626) and ends with the man who declared the death of God in Europe, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 - 1900). Prominent philosophers covered in this volume include Descartes, Hobbes, Rousseau, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Immanuel Kant, Hegel, Marx and Kierkegaard.

Volume Three, **Contemporary Philosophy**, treats at least twenty-two philosophers and schools of thought. It starts with the British Neo-Idealism of Thomas Hill Green (1836 - 1882) and ends with John Rawls. Readers will find great satisfaction in Logical Positivism, and Pragmatism, Philosophy of Evolution, Phenomenology Existentialism, The Analytic Movement and in philosophers like Heidegger, Marcel, Merleau-Ponty, Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, Wittgenstein, Russell and Karl Popper.

The author has simply covered an area whose interest is all fields of human knowledge, the greatest minds and thought of all epoch, how they evolve, and are evolving. Just as Alfred Jules Ayer introduced 'Logical Positivism' to the English audience of his time with his 1936 book, **Language, Truth and Logic**. Joseph Omorogbe has brought philosophy to the threshold of his countrymen, and indeed this part of the world with his three volume **A Simplified History of Western Philosophy**.

Philosophy is what philosophers say on socio-political, moral, legal, ethical, epistemological, physical (natural), metaphysical - which relates to science, social science, the arts, education, psychology, sociology, etc - issues and questions. What is therefore the best way to present the history of philosophy, since the latter is supposed to be a magazine presentation of the former? Traditionally, some writers give the development of ideas through generations priority over the individual philosophers as they emerge to contribute to such prevailing ideas. On the other hand, most prefer to treat particular philosophers as they engage on such evolving ideas.

J. I. Omoregbe adopted the latter method.

The other serious question is this: Should the historian of philosophy be passive or critical in his approach? J. I. Omoregbe was midway in his approach. He presents the various philosophers and their philosophies elaborately before any criticisms are proffered.

Apart from the fertile area it covered, a few factors would endear readers to the 3 - volume texts. It is one of the most simplified books on the history of philosophy, it is quite detailed and current in contents. The prominence given to some philosophers like Francis Suarez; the Islamic and Jewish Philosophers; and the inclusion of contemporary philosophers like Karl Popper; Bertrand Russell and John Rawls. Its adequate treatment of the moral and religious views of most philosophers would put this three - volume masterpiece at a great advantage and credibility.

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