

HUMANISM AS SELF DEFENCE: AN AFRICAN INTERPRETATION

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Introduction

To the game theorist, the world is a field where interests continuously play out; with the smartest or the strongest dominating. This domination can be cultural, political, economic, religious and even epistemological. This is why international relations and politics is commonly seen in terms of the Hobbesian state of nature; where the strong prey on the weak, the weak on the weaker and so on. The history of mankind is the history of domination propagated and perpetuated by interest. This is the spirit and posture that ushered in and propelled imperialism in the African colonies. It reflected basically in the denial of the humanity of the African by the Europeans, as such the blacks should serve for the benefit of the whites. For instance, slavery was hitched on the fact that certain work, especially work on the plantations in the new world required cheap and sub-human labour; hence the obvious port of call became Africa, the then perceived non-human continent (negroes were found to fit the plantation work more than the American Indians). Prevalent at the time was the comparison of the Africans to brutes, commonly the apes; giving rise to the aphorism, 'black monkeys'. Penny Sparrow, a South African real estate agent, in clear terms expresses this spirit while referring to the blacks of Africa. She avers;

From now, I shall address the blacks of South Africa as monkeys as I see the cute little wild monkeys do the same pick drop and litter. These monkeys that are allowed to be released on the new year's eve and new year's day onto public beaches, towns, et.c, obviously have no education whatsoever, so to allow them loose is inviting huge dirt and troubles and discomfort to (humans).¹

The implication here is that the African lacks the nature that constitutes human. In fact, denying the humanity of the Africans gave the colonizers the moral ground to freely carryout forms of inhuman practices in the continent. Equally, one easily understands why philosophers like David Hume, Immanuel Kant and Georg Hegel vigorously supported the European exploitative spirit and mission in Africa. Religiously, it was admitted that the Blackman could not conceive the existence of a supernatural being. Put succinctly, the belief is that "without any exception (Africans) are without a belief in a Supreme Being, neither have they any form of worship or idolatry, nor is the darkness of their minds enlightened by even a ray of superstition. Their mind is as stagnant as the morass which forms its punny world".² This posture of the missionaries is reminiscent of Lucien Levy-Bruhl anthropological conclusion about the African. Invariably, this is why the missionaries to the African continent regarded themselves as savior of souls for God. As such, even colonialism could pass for a salvific work; after all, "since Africans were regarded as sub humans, colonialism by Europe became a gospel of redemption and elevation of the negro to some human status". Again, the fact that the African was untutored means he equally lacks knowledge, so incapable of epistemological

speculations. Hegel fiercely espouses this belief. In his view:

The peculiarly African character is difficult to comprehend, the very reason that in reference to it, we must quite give up the principle which naturally accompanies all our ideas- the category of universality. In Negro life the characteristic point is the fact that consciousness has not yet attained the realization of any substantial objective existence- as for example, God or law- in which the interest of man's volition is involved and in which he realized his own being. Thus distinction between himself as an individual and the universality of his essential being, the African in the uniform, undeveloped oneness of his existence has not yet attained; so that the knowledge of an absolute Being, an Other and a Higher than his individual self, is entirely wanting.³

Western scholars held onto this position for a long time; their conclusion is that the African world is shrouded in fetishism and mythology. This became the basis for their dismissal of African philosophy and thought pattern as bundle of illogical and mythical thinking, not fit for philosophical consideration. That is, the African thought is more emotional than logical; logic being considered a basic and peculiar characteristic of the western philosophy and way of life. In his work, *African Philosophy through Ubuntu*, Ramose argues that this is why the colonizer initiated attempts to rationalize and present the African world-view or the African self, since in his belief, it was impossible for the African to compose a picture of himself. The colonizer believes he is able to penetrate and describe the African mental state which the African himself appears unable to do. In other words, if the colonized is granted any knowledge at all, it is on the basis that such is seen as initiated by the colonizer. In his own words, "impelled by the will to dominate the condescend or is often ready to entertain the probability of philosophy provided the judgment pertaining to the experience, knowledge and truth about African philosophy is recognized as the sole and exclusive right of the condescendor".⁴ Culturally, economically and politically, the belief was that the African could not differentiate his right from his left, since he was unable to measure up to the European standard, which was seen as the ideal. J. Freire d'Andrade, an attaché to the Portuguese embassy in Washington in objecting to the granting of independence to the African nations was emphatic that "many countries in Africa are not ready for independence because of the fact that they do not think as we do and have different conception of progress than ourselves".⁵ As such, colonialism was taken as a civilizing mission to bring the backward Africans up to date culturally, economically and politically. To do this, Ikenga Oraegbunam points out that for the colonizer, "the inevitable starting point was to denigrate and relegate everything African to an inferior background including the humanity of the African. It is the superiority posture and the consequent depersonalization by the European of the African person that resulted in the proliferation of Levy Bruhl racist anthropologies that denied Africans their personhood".⁶ Consequently, the eagerness behind the scramble and portioning of the continent according to the competing interests and availability of raw materials that align with these interests.

For the African, the options were either to submit completely to colonialism and be annihilated or to stand up and defend himself. Gratefully, the African chose to defend himself; an option which Ramose sees as a natural right and necessary in this case. Hence he began the battle for the realization and establishment of the African person or identity

or what scholars call the ‘Rationality Debate’. An aspect of this is the accusation and counter accusation that raged on for a long time between western scholars and African scholars on the existence and authenticity of African philosophy or personality. Therefore, an offshoot of the European denial of humanity to the African is a proportional response by the African asserting his humanity. At the present, we note that Africa and Africans have come through the age of slavery, colonialism and epistemological denial with some level of success, but there are questions raised by these activities which still resonate in the present era. For instance, since the dawn of her independence, the Africa is still grappling with what truly constitutes her personality. That is, who is the contemporary African? What kind of human is he? What are the proofs of his humanity? These are pertinent questions and it is necessary we tackle them, bearing in mind the efforts that have been made at representing the African identity and the subsisting de-personalization of the African. Also there is the issue of social disintegration from within the continent arising from the influences of neo-colonialism from without, which are contributory to this confusion. Thus, how is the response? In other words, Africa since the dawn of literacy has defended herself against western denials and interference, but how effective has this been?

Clarification of Concepts

Humanism

The word humanism derives from the Latin *humanitas* meaning human nature, civilization and kindness. *Humanitas* corresponds directly to the Greek concepts *philanthropia* which is a friendly feeling towards other men and *peideia* which translates as love for or training in the liberal arts. For this reason, humanism right from onset has been used in two senses ;(1) benevolence towards one’s fellow humans and (2) the values imparted by good literatures (*bonae litterae*) or human learning. Bearing this in mind, Cicero states that what differentiates man from brutes is dialogue, which when rationally guided should enable them settle disputes and live together in harmony under the rule of law. But subsequent use of the term tended to equate humanism with philanthropy alone, relegating its reference to literature or arts. Consequently, in the fifteenth century renaissance, the Italian term *umanista* which stands for a teacher or student of classic literature was coined to re-emphasize the importance of the liberal arts in positing the higher place of man among other animals in the world. Within this time in Italy, teachers and scholars of philosophy, poetry and rhetoric were called and equally regarded themselves as humanists. But whichever the use, what is obvious is that humanism is a stance, attitude or idea that espouses the value and agency of humans: individually and collectively. “It is a broad category of ethical, metaphysical, epistemological, (religious) and political philosophies in which human interests, values and dignity predominate. It has an ultimate faith in humankind, believes that human beings possess the power or potentiality of solving their own problems, through reliance primarily upon reason and scientific method applied with courage and vision”.⁷ Thus humanists prefer approaches to knowledge based on scientific evidence (sensory experience) and critical thinking rather than basing it on dogma and superstition. This is why skepticism forms an integral part of humanism, since based on its use of the scientific method all knowledge or policies whether scientific, moral or social are tentative; subject to further revision. In other words, there are no absolute norms of life or of the society. Decisions and policies are formulated

based on how they affect human lives, individually and collectively at a time. Edwards asserts:

We maintain that human values make sense only in the context of human life. We ground our ethical decisions and ideals in human needs and concerns as opposed to the alleged needs and concerns of supposed deities or other transcendent entities or powers. We measure the value of a given choice by how it affects human life, and in this we include our individual selves, our families, our society and the peoples of the earth. This human perspective limits us to human ways of comprehending the world and to human drives and aspirations as motive force.⁸

This shows why modern humanist movements are more or less forms of secularism; a non-theistic life stance, since the divine is given least consideration, if at all. But this is not to imply that the secularist's position entirely permeates humanism. Rather, humanism forms component of any philosophical system or ideology that emphasizes human flourishing, goodness and establishment of a better world for the future generation. So, there are renaissance, enlightenment, romantic, religious, secular, cultural, Marxist, educational, modern, African humanism and so on.

African humanism in line with general humanist conception has the good of human being or the African as its central focus. But unlike the atheist position commonly associated with general humanism, African humanism is inseparable from the traditional African religion. This is because religion is central to the African understanding of his world, which is why he has been variously described by scholars as incurably religious. However at the center of the traditional religious practices is man, through whom the supernatural is perceived. African religion is principally anthropocentric. That is, even God is said to exist for the sake of man,⁹ and the spiritual is understood as relevant depending on how they affect human lives. Man is not seen as an individual but in a community. "The community makes the individual. An African worth or identity among the people depends on where the community places him/her."¹⁰ This is the idea in the concept, *Ubuntu*, which translates as I am what I am because of who we all are. In this light, African humanism considers the value, interest and good of man individually, and importantly, collectively. The African is most concerned with the happiness of others and catering for common good, and this is done in such a manner that its impact extends to the entire humanity.

African Philosophy

Just as with the definition of philosophy, controversy exists among scholars concerning the definition of African philosophy. However, they agree that African philosophy is basically a critical reflection on the African, his world and the attempts he makes to comprehend his environment. Elaborating on this C.B. Okolo avers that "African philosophy thus places special emphasis on the African, his world, history, values et.c., and on the significance these have for him. In general, it explores the particular way or ways the African experiences, conceives and interprets nature, society, religion, man, God, human conduct, and so on".¹¹ Consequently, African philosophy aligns with other philosophies whose method is critical thinking geared towards "problem solving, elucidation or even interpretation..."¹² This differentiates philosophy from ordinary thinking which is a natural capacity of all men irrespective of place or time and from ethnology which is an attempt to describe uncritical cultural issues and world views of

particular people. These had been grounds on which western scholars had denied the existence of African philosophy. But African philosophy exists; it has come through this period to assert its place among other philosophies. This is why Maurice Makumba in his *Introduction to African Philosophy*, asserts that “African philosophy has become necessary feature of contemporary philosophical discourse, and an indispensable instrument in the formation of culture today”.¹³ He equally adds that the question now is no longer whether it exists, but it is “more essence-oriented and theme related questions concerning methodology, content, types, authorship, et.c.”¹⁴

Self Defence

The right of self defence is an inalienable or natural right of all humans; it is instinctive in all animals. It states that persons have the basic right to use any reasonable force in defence of oneself or one’s life. This defensive force in certain circumstances can be a deadly force. Ramose elucidates:

Self defence is a natural, perhaps even an instinctive reaction of all living organisms confronted with imminent injury. A large segment of humanity accepts that in the name of self defence one human being may injure or even kill another if killing is the only and necessary option in the circumstances. If this were not so, our planet would have long been free of military establishment. Moreover, we would have dismantled and totally destroyed all weapons where ever they may be in the world.¹⁵

In the *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes uses the term as an operating factor in the state of nature, which differentiates it from the modern society. Since individuals in the state of nature are overwhelmed by fear of violent death, self defence is justified as the highest necessity. For John Locke, the only reason why men willingly forgo the unsafe freedom of the state of nature is to achieve mutual preservation of their lives, liberties and estates in the civil society. Consequently, self defence is justified on the basis of individual autonomy and the fact that this is composed of several inalienable rights. And in defence of these rights, it is permitted to repel force by force; the law justifies all use of violence in defence of these rights whether in one’s person or his property. “No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone had a natural right to defend his "Life, health, Liberty, or Possessions.”¹⁶ Obvious from here is the fact that there is no distinction between the individual and his property. This probably derives from the fact that property just like human life is a natural right of man and as such an attack on his means of livelihood is equally considered an attempt on his life. To this would be added that all forms of social, cultural and epistemological denials account same as attacking the person of the individual in question. In other words, the option of defending oneself is invoked on the part of the individual.

Humanity of Man

What makes man a human being? What qualities constitute the humanity of man? What are those features by which humans are said to be different from other animals? In opening his **Metaphysics**, Aristotle observed that all men irrespective of race desire to know. This according to him is because man is a rational animal; hence the desire to know is a basic composition of humanity. The history of philosophy shows that the sense of wonder and pursuit of knowledge had been fundamental aspect of man. The Ionian philosophers represent this fact. Thus, “Thales had a very curious mind which impelled

him to seek a rational explanation for the nature of the cosmos. He was very eager to know and he is said to have fallen into a well on one occasion while gazing into the sky, observing the stars with curiosity....”¹⁷This signaled the break away from the supernatural consideration of reality, which marked the Homeric era and subsequent focus on the nature of man to obtain the explanation of the nature of the world, things, man and even the supernatural in the history of thought. This is also obvious in Descartes attempt to establish the existence of the world, and man through reason, expressed in his famous *cogito ergo sum*- I think, therefore I exist. But this Cartesian attempt does not go down well with the empiricists, who insist that it negates the sensory aspect of man which is equally a reliable source of knowledge. Man is able to acquire true knowledge through observation and sensory perception. The fact remains that none of the groups in contention doubts that humans are able to know.¹⁸ As such, the search for or the desire to know is a defining quality of man. Hence reason Heidegger holds that man is the being in whose nature being is in question. “The very asking of this is an entity’s mode of being; and as such it gets to the essential character from what is inquired about, namely, being. This entity which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its being, we shall denote by the term Dasein”.¹⁹ Closely associated with reason, knowledge or the ability to question about being is speech or language. For language is used to promulgate knowledge. Therefore, “thinking and language are intricately intertwined”.²⁰ Man is a being in language. According to Wittgenstein, he conceives and understands the world and himself through language. Omoregbe posits:

Since language is used to speak about reality, it presupposes a correspondence between reality and language, i.e. between the structure of reality and the structure of language. The structure of the world thus...is pictured for us by language. This picture of language, like any other kind of picture, is a model of reality.²¹

Hence language involves a systematic combination of meaningless elements as symbols, sounds or gestures into utterances that convey meaning. This is a mental process of manipulation and structuring of grammar, symbolization and vocalization. And because this mental process is logical, “the possession of language places man on a higher pedestal in the world committee of creatures”.²² The fact of diversity in human languages had led scholars to disagree on whether human languages have anything in common, that is whether human thought pattern share any common features. Irrespective of the extent of this disagreement, it is obvious that through dialogue men are able to achieve some consensus and draw certain conclusions not minding their different languages; the fact of expression is common to all human languages. Therefore, our different languages have something in common. Dialogue is the highest expression of man’s possession of speech. This is implied by Cicero while positing that speech is what distinguishes man from brutes and when aligned with reason helps to settle disputes and organizes the society according to the rule of law.

The possession of speech or language points to another reality, the fact that man is not a lone being in the world. As Aristotle puts it, man is by nature a social animal. That is, nature intends man to live in a society or in groups. “That nature intends man to live in a society is evident, according to Aristotle from man’s gift of speech, for nature does nothing in vain. It is only in a society that the gift of speech has any meaning and use.

Hence it shows that nature intended man to live in a society”.²³ Aristotle also opines that he who is unable to live in a society because he is self-sufficient is either a beast or a god. Naturally, man is a dependent being, for he needs the society to compliment his being. The society manifests his potentialities. It explains the fact that man is continuously in search to discover his being: that is his potentials. The society provides the situations or circumstances which satisfy this search. Consequently, scholars conclude that because man lives in the society, the study and understanding of man cannot be divorced from the study of human societies, which are products of human groups and their environment.²⁴

In Igbo-African philosophy, man is defined in terms of the community. Ogugua asserts that “to be a man is to be a community being”.²⁵ But this is on a deeper level more than the Aristotelian social being. C.B. Nze explains this in terms of participation; the African is a man “in so far as he participates in the life of the community. It is this participation which constitutes his being as man”.²⁶ The African community is composed of beings or vital forces that are connected together in a perpetual chain of interaction. So, the conception of a solitary being, existing all by itself, independent of other forces is foreign to the African. And because forces are joined together, influences of beings are constant, such that maintains harmonious co-existence between forces in the community. This harmonious existence is paramount to the existence of man as an individual and the community as a whole. Harmonious existence and communion of men as such implies sharing a common culture. Man is a culture being or as Ogugua puts it, “to be a man is to be a cultural being, with a language in a community”.²⁷ This implies that the Igbo-African life (and that of other men) is community centered because it is culture bound. It is within the cultural sphere that the communion and interaction of beings make sense.

Equally central to the existence of man and organization of the society is the rule of law. Organized society is a prerequisite for the survival of man on earth; hence nature intends man to live in a political environment. Law is the basis on which the society is constituted, for it signifies man’s attempt to rationally organize his life. On this, Appadorai defines law as “a body of rules to guide human action”.²⁸ Invariably, this suggests that the rule of law is natural to man, since he always conducts his life according to certain rules. “Law... is only applicable to human beings for it presupposes rationality and freedom and human beings are the only free, rational beings in the universe. Only human beings can be said to be governed by law, and it can only be intended for human beings”.²⁹ The existence of law and man’s subjection to it is as old as man’s awareness of right and wrong or good and evil. In other words, the establishment of the law is associated with man’s sense of morality. Though this does not imply that law and morality are the same, but that the decision of man to conduct his life according to certain rules derives from natural life’s demands. For nature intends man to behave in certain ways or to do certain things, and in the other way round, nature forbids man to do certain things or to behave in certain ways.³⁰ The reason for this is that man should strive to preserve his life in accordance with natural demands. This demand includes the common good of individuals in the society, which is the basic societal condition, laws are established to secure. So, the ability to secure and preserve common good of the society is a defining feature of the humanity of man, not minding Hobbes ‘State of nature and his concept of individuality’. For this is the basic reason for coming together as a group, hence the existence of the state and its laws which are means of pursuing this. It explains the eagerness with which men easily came together in a society as brought out in the contract theories. For as Locke argues, men enjoyed freedom and property in the state of nature but this was unsafe and unsecured. This made

man willing to quit this condition of fear and unfree to join in a society with others who already are or have the mind of doing so for the mutual preservation of their lives, liberties and estates. “The purpose of government (the state) was to secure human entitlements and ensure lives, liberties and the material possession of all human beings”.³¹ Humanism as an attitude to life has to do with human flourishing and doing good not just now, in the present but with leaving the world a better place for the future generation.

Humanism in African Tradition

In exposing the anthropocentric character of the Igbo-African tradition, Oguejiofor asserts, “nature and human society are relevant but their relevance is measured according to their influence on man”.³² Ogugua agrees with this but adds that this is also ‘*vita* and *cultura*’ centered.³³ But the question of life and culture have significance only with reference to man, after all Ogugua also states that “it is because Igbo understanding is anthropocentric that being vitalistic cropped up”³⁴ in the first place. As such the issue of life and culture more or less just adds to the centrality of man in the African thought system. Therefore, the African world is a humanist world; that is, it affirms the life, worth, welfare or wellbeing of the human person. This Egbunu terms African humanism. Discussing its key attributes he adds that we should understand that it is not all humanist thoughts that are atheist or iconoclastic.³⁵ By this he intends to distinguish the African religious character from the common secularist view which has become associated with humanism since the 16th century. Ogugua uses the Igbo to clearly paint this African character. He writes, “the character of the Igbo man is an outcrop of his religious belief which got its colour, content and shape by the Igbo character”.³⁶ This buttresses the stand of scholars that the African world is suffused with religion; as “religion permeates into all the departments of (their) life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it”.³⁷ Thus, African tradition is essentially human centered with a religious outlook. God, spirits and the ancestors exist for man and are at the service of man. The divine world is such that its existence is based on the perception of man, since it is weighed from the view point of man. African religion is therefore centered more on man than on the divine, and it is understood there from. “Religion is focused on the enhancement of human existence rather than on the natural world or the divine”³⁸

Equally, man occupies the central position among other things in the natural or created world in African system. The story of creation, both the biblical account and the Igbo traditional setting lend credence to man being the crown of God’s creation. Citing the Igbo instance Oguejiofor again opines that the Igbo culture places the human being or man (*mmadu*) at the center of the universe, nature, society itself and a host of innumerable spiritual beings are relevant in so far as they affect the human person.³⁹ In other words, the created world is perceived in terms of its usefulness to humanity who is its pivot. This aligns with the Heideggerian perception of the world in terms of its usefulness to man, its focal point. The world has meaning only in terms of its utility to man as he pursues his life’s concerns. Mbiti records the Abulaya creation story that clearly shows this; “god created man so that the sun would have someone for whom to shine. Then He created plants, animals and birds to provide food for him”.⁴⁰ Hence the importance of these are seen from how they affect the human person. As such the human person is the bridge or connection between the visible and invisible worlds. About this, Ogugua writes; “at the center of the universe is man. Every being and God is at the service of man. Man through physical activities, sacrifices, rituals, prayers etc. maintain the balance in the

universe”.⁴¹ Mbiti stresses the importance of this balance when he adds “that an ontological balance must be maintained between God and man, the spirits and man, the departed and the living. When this balance is upset, people experience misfortunes and sufferings, or fear that these will strike them”.⁴² Therefore, human beings link the universe up to the divine. Though God sustains and upholds creatures, yet it is man that brings them closer to Him. Humans preside and direct the universe such that harmony exists therein. This expresses the pride of place of man in creation, and as well the mission of his life in the world.

There is no dualism in the African conception of the universe. “Both the spiritual and the physical realms of the universe are believed to work in consistent harmony and are subject to an ordered systems and rhythm”.⁴³ That is, both realms are interwoven and interdependent. The Igbo people according to Ogugua, hold that this dependence is obvious from the unity and interrelationships that exist among beings.⁴⁴ It is man’s responsibility to sustain this interdependence and interrelationship of beings in the world. Man is seen as a unitary being whose nature is ontologically non dualistic. Though African scholars unlike their western counter part agree on the unitary being of man, yet they posit varied ideas on the exact constitution of his being. According to Makinde, the Yoruba people have tripartite conception of a person; *Ara* (body), *Emi* (soul) and *Ori* (inner head).⁴⁵ For the Igala people, Egbunu posits that humans are basically made up of the body and soul; but the soul is divided into breath (*olai/inmi*) and the spirit double (*ojokido’wa/okai*), which has one part dwelling with God but still functions in the individual while the other part is attached to the person’s forehead.⁴⁶ Ogugua cites that most writers on Igbo world view especially Metuh argue that the Igbo distinguish four principal parts of man; heart (*Obi*), spirit or shadow (*mmuo/onyinyo*), destiny (*chi*) and ancestral guardian (*eke*). But he disagrees with this position. In the Igbo ontology according to him, the human person is made up seven constituent parts; *Alu* (body), *Obi* (heart), *Mkpuruobi* (soul), *Ako/Uche* (thought), *Agbo* (inherited character), *Chi* and *Eke* (destiny and spiritual being) and *Mmuo* (ghost). He argues that this is because “the septenary character of nature and world is not foreign to the Igboman. We talk of ‘*Ofia asaa, Mmiri asaa, Izu asaa, Onwa asaa*’ et.c. The way our people look at kola nut with seven lobes testifies to this understanding”.⁴⁷ But however the stand of these scholars on this and the basis on which they are founded, the fact is that they accept that there is no clear cut dichotomy that exist between these constituent parts. Human being is one. Though man’s nature is partly material and partly immaterial, they are intricately joined together such that they form a union deeper than the Platonic body and soul, wherein the soul is just a prisoner in the body. Thus, the African sees and refers to himself as a unitary being.

As stated earlier, the African is a community being. Explaining the Igbo example Ogugua summarily elucidates, “in short, the community is the Igbo man’s life”.⁴⁸ For this reason the individual conceives of himself and is also defined in terms of collectivity. The African places the common good and welfare of the community before himself; he considers his good in relation to that of others. Discussing this further in the Igbo life, Okere explains that the ‘self’ is congenitally communitarian self, incapable of being, existing and really unthinkable except in the complex of relations of the community.⁴⁹ This is the basis for the assertion ‘I am because we are, and since we are, I am’. For the African, it is the community that gives the individual life, nurtures him till death and also assigns him his place in the afterlife. Egbunu asserts that:

He (the African) is born and bred in the family; he lives, moves and dies within the family of the living and the dead. This family within which man's being oscillates already embodies the spiritual root on the basis of the conviction that all members of the family belong to one ancestry, which traces back to God. Human beings are connected as family beings, and all families trace back to God.⁵⁰

Community forms the basis of the African personhood and therefore his humanity. Consequently, the African hardly conceives of individuated existence or things standing alone by themselves, independent of others. The individual is part of the whole which makes his person. This is perceived and performed in such a manner that it impacts on the entire humanity in the world. This universal interconnectedness of all human is the central to the idea 'Ubuntu' as shown earlier.

African Humanism as Self Defence

We noted earlier that questions had been raised as to what African thought system is and has got to contribute to the world order by some western and western minded African scholars. That is, does the African thought pattern qualify as philosophy at all? This gave birth to the prolonged debate on the existence and nature of African philosophy or the 'Rationality Debate' as scholars commonly refer to it. In the work, *African Philosophy in Search of Identity*, D. A. Masolo elaborates;

The birth of the debate on African philosophy is historically associated with two related happenings: western discourse on Africa, and the African response to it. This dialogue has taken many forms and has discussed a variety of topics and ideas depicting individual's role and impact in the shaping and control of one's identity and destiny. At the center of this debate is the concept of reason; a value which is believed to stand as the great divide between the civilized and the uncivilized, the logical and the mystical. The debate evolved as claims and counter claims, justifications and alienations, passed between the two camps: western and non-western.⁵¹

Obviously under question and needing justification is not just the African thought pattern, but specifically the African personhood, humanity or identity. Is the African human? If he is, is he rational? Does his world view speak more of logic or emotion? The very consideration of these and their implications for the African person led Aime Cesaire to sound his awakening call to all Africans. The major message of this call is the re-asserting of the humanity of the African which western system tried to annihilate and to keep the necessity of this task within the consciousness of Africans. D.A. Masolo explains;

Cesaire's "Return to the Native Land" was therefore a symbolic call to all black peoples to rally together around the idea of common origin and in a struggle to defend that unifying commonality. To Cesaire, negritude meant exactly this-a unifying idea of common origin for all black peoples. It became their rallying point, their identity tag and part of a language of resistance to the stereotype of the African "savage".⁵²

²So, the Eurocentric stance made a demand on the African to defend himself, hence precipitating several literary positions that assert firstly, the existence of the African person, secondly the logic in the African consciousness and thirdly, African place with respect to other cultural expressions. As Makumba puts it, “the early generation of African academicians in the twentieth century worked strenuously to lay to rest previous objections concerning the existence of African philosophy and, therefore of the African philosopher. Current research seems to be demonstrating this even more”.⁵³ Thus African philosophy from the onset took a defensive stance, since it has been embroiled in the struggle to justify itself or its concepts. Unlike the European, Asian or Indian philosophies, the African thought system is required to clarify its existence, nature, method and concepts. This controversy entails why the term African philosophy and any topic therein easily takes a center stage in any philosophical discourse. Consequently, African scholars have written extensively, delving through different epochs to establish the impact of African thought and person in building not just a particular cultural view but equally the universal thought of humanity; any philosophy does not dwell on a particular circumstance but moves beyond this towards universal connection and contribution. In this regard, there are classification of African scholars into schools and thoughts according to different periods in defence of the nature of African philosophy and approach. According to Njoku there are Ethno, Universal and Hermeneutic schools. The positions of the first two schools are opposed to each other. Ethno from its etymology means tribe, culture or a segment of a people, and when prefixed to the word philosophy, it implies a cultural thought or world view of a particular people or group. Scholars here “claim that philosophy is to be found embedded in the mythical, linguistic and religious world views of different cultures, and as such a philosophy is unique to its geographical application”.⁵⁴ In other words, ethno philosophy spells out collective consciousness, cultural relativism and limited notion of philosophy; scholars in the Universal school believe this varies from the proper definition of philosophy. The Universalists’ contention is first, that philosophy makes a universal appeal and not some relative cultural experience; philosophy is rational, theoretical and scientific. Second, that philosophy involves an individual effort at critical reflection and not a presentation of collective cultural ideals couched in philosophical jargons. Such collective communal vision is normally believed to stifle the individual who is considered the off-shoot of any philosophy. Philosophy is a detached questioning. This should involve rigorous and sustained questioning of perceived ideals.

A critical African philosophy comes as a result of individual critique of his culture, or ‘*a mise-en-cause*’, that is an individual critical interrogation of common vision of a community. In other words, African philosophy entails a radical questioning of African cultural experience. It means a radical interrogation of its ethno philosophy as expressed in myths, proverbs, folklores, wise sayings et.c.⁵⁵

So, the contention is that at best, ethno philosophy requires further rational substantiation if at all any philosophy can arise from it; because the meaning it purports is muddled-up and incoherent. Implicitly then, philosophy differs greatly from the cultural suppositions of the Ethno School. Third, philosophy requires literary expression as is common with the western philosophy. So, the attempt to precipitate philosophy from or regard oral sayings of the traditional Africans as potentially philosophical signals a false route to philosophy.

Arguing from a reconciliatory position, Anyanwu does not entirely dismiss the concept of Ethno philosophy as did the Universal school. While not accepting that collective cultural world view of a people entirely qualifies as philosophy, he still argues that every philosophy bears an imprint of a particular culture. It is a mark of its origin and identity. "In other words: a philosophical investigation cannot be attributed to a particular culture, unless it is clearly marked by this culture or otherwise directly concerned with it".⁵⁶ Just as western philosophy is addressed as such because it bears the western cultural imprint, so should philosophy in Africa not be entirely dissected from African cultural imprints. There can be no foreground without a background; no one speaks from nowhere. So, such sharp demarcation between philosophy and cultural input is unnecessary. Besides "the starting point of any philosophy must of necessity be the common sense experiences and beliefs (of a people) which are by their very nature philosophical".⁵⁷ However, such common cultural experiences must be turned towards solving universal problem of mankind or contribute towards the unity of human knowledge and not only limited to its particular situation. For "there is besides the local or regional cultures, a patrimony of universal human culture, whether scientific, artistic or humanistic, which has a universal and eternal value".⁵⁸ Philosophy is contributory to this. Again, philosophy is both a mode of life (cultural) and a thought pattern (scientific). In the former sense, it reflects on the common cultural experiences of a people, while in the later sense, it contributes to building a universal thought pattern. Both senses are not divergent as the former contributes towards deepening the later. For this reason, Anyanwu advises that there is need for restoring and re-creating a respectable body of the African wisdom (past works of anonymous wise men inclusive) and expressing it in a universally understandable language, for only in this form can African philosophy be seen as making contribution equivalent to those of the west or east.⁵⁹ And it is only from this perspective that African philosophy would be making a scientific and universal appeal. Therefore, philosophy need not only be scientific, written, nor is it purely a detached individual contribution to be seen as such. Following this line of thought, Odera Oluka believes that there existed in traditional Africa sages who were experts in didactic wisdom and whose coherent thoughts constituted the basis of their communal culture, though their thoughts were orally transmitted alone. According to him, these sages were "critical independent thinkers who guide their thought and judgment by the power of reason and inborn insight rather than by the authority of communal consensus".⁶⁰ For him, these thoughts qualify as philosophy, that is what he calls philosophic sagacity, which differs from mere folk tales.

Arguing from another perspective, the effort of the scholars in the Ethno School could be seen as a ploy to deny Africa the ability to philosophize. The point is that though their intention is to make an African imprint on the philosophical map, yet this effort postulates that African philosophy differs from philosophy as it is done in the west. That is, that African philosophy does not follow the known laws of thought. Ochieng Odhiambo explains this;

African philosophy is a lived communal philosophy, a *weltanschauung*, and is therefore not identifiable with any individual in particular. It is at best exercised as a collective wisdom of the people, in which every individual of the society participates. African philosophy is taken to be quite distinct from western or European philosophy, which is taken to be rigorous, critical and individual. Critical, abstract, independent and so-

called objective thought is therefore foreign to Africa.⁶¹

From this perspective then, their attempt is self-defeating, since it rather affirms that the African mind is pre-logical and pre-philosophical, instead of denying this, which is a position it intends to point out with respect to the rationalist debate. For Hountondji this amounts to unconsciously re-asserting the position of the colonialists, who desire nothing more than to have the African live under the belief that his communal world view amounts the same as philosophy. And because of this, Ernest Wamba-dia-wamba and Christian Neugebauer dismiss ethno philosophy as a demonstration of the domineering and racist posture of the Europeans in Africa. As cited by Ochieng-Odhiambo, these scholars argue that the contributions to African philosophy such as Tempel's, is a show of how un-European Africa is. And since it is intended to portray this difference, therefore popularize the European colonial interests, this effort is not any different from Hegel's or Kant's racial comments about Africa.⁶² Consequently, this mark of western domination and racism is unacceptable. But still holding to his mediatory position, Anyanwu again, views the fore on as constituting common pitfall of most African intellectuals. That is, the tendency to either discuss philosophy entirely from its scientific and rationalistic sense, thereby rejecting cultural ideals as outdated and unscientific. Or to entirely reject the rationalist and scientific input into Africa as an aspect of western colonialism. Philosophy is rational as well as cultural. In his words, "even the most rational science must contain some pre-rational elements and an intuitive starting point. We often know what we want to believe, long before we are able to prove it".⁶³ The human mind is hardly rid of pre-conceptions. As such an analysis of the works of these Africans and African minded western scholars will reveal an effort towards discovering collective African identity. A true philosopher knows the fact that difference does not necessarily imply inferiority or denigration of race and on this basis should be able to make racial differentiation. This is the truth of the colonial ideological currents. Therefore, an authentic African personality or identity must be sought through the analysis and clarification of the existential conditions of the African people. To properly do this, "we must have an open philosophy as found partly in existentialism. African philosophy finds here a model of a philosophical investigation which need not to be tied to western rationalism and which allows us to incorporate into an open wisdom both the myth and science, both reductive and deductive reason and pre-rational intuition".⁶⁴ In other words, the distinction introduced by the Universal School is a bit far off. The fact, as Ochieng-Odhiambo points out is that these scholars comprise mainly of western schooled Africans, probably why it is convenient for them to limit philosophy only to its technical sense and to modern literary Africa.⁶⁵ Their western literary background would have exercised great influence on them such that in seeking to disprove the European denigration of the African, they to certain extent did it in the pattern of the system which they intended to disapprove. As such, they are as guiltier of what they accuse others of.

The open philosophical investigation that is tolerant of both culture and universality is incorporated in the position of the Hermeneutic School. This approach is proposed as a way of tackling contemporary existential realities in Africa. That is, "philosophy emerges from a seasoned clarification of meaning in the life experiences of the African people".⁶⁶ This position is recent than the former two and it is conceived as a defence and response to the continual occupation and domination of the African in the form of neo-colonialism and racialism. Although the colonialists are long gone from the African lands, their influences and control are still very manifest in the contemporary African life.

The African mind constantly replays the colonial situation in post-colonial Africa as if by the colonialists themselves. Njoku puts it this way, “neo-colonialism solicits the support of the African in giving away their riches and identity. (Hence) the struggle for liberation has become confused indeed”.⁶⁷ This confusion which arises as a result of the clash between traditional ideals and colonial influences, therefore, requires violent confrontation in order for the authentic African to evolve. Violent because colonialism itself was a violent interruption of African personhood which ingrained split personality in the person of the African. This would be a form of re-orientation or a rigorous linguistic psycho-analysis, which would consistently search and elucidate the roots of this confusion that bedevils the African. This is a hermeneutical approach and would be grounded on a lived African experience. Thus, African philosophy is pursued in terms of unflinching interpretation and re-interpretation of the African lived experience.

Hermeneuticity will explore, and be rooted in the ‘historicalness’ of specific African lived experience. The African experience has its own existential space or environment of occurrence. The philosophical discourse within the space, which is not always philosophical, must respond to the ‘felt crises’ of an African lived environment. Africa..., has its own horizon within which are rooted the realities that provoke its philosophical discourse. Therefore Africa has its own concerns which dominate its philosophical space and discourse.⁶⁸

This process encapsulates the path to the rejuvenation of authentic African mind set, existence and humanity which lies beyond the shadows of western dominion. Without the traditional ideals, this is unattainable, as these ideals laid the foundation of African struggle against colonialism, and would form the basis to the future. A future that is predominantly African but also retains important features of western influences. Therefore, the hermeneutical current builds a bridge among culture, traditionality and scientificity. “The traditional realities that impede science are to be abandoned and values that aid science and technology are to be cultivated. This was the secret of the progress in European philosophy”.⁶⁹ Secret that would be relevant in presenting an authentic African personhood which transcend its contemporary limitations. So, hermeneutic is employed as a method of African defence and response in an atmosphere challenged on either side by politico-economic underdevelopment, racialism and neo-colonialism. The African desire to come to terms with himself and to project this self towards universal appreciation and acceptance necessarily requires a hermeneutical touch. For this reason, we adopt this Hermeneutical current here.

Concluding Reflection

It is obvious that “the search for African identity envisaged in the development of African thought is an offshoot of the ideological project of self-affirmation and of an assertive cultural nationalism, in the face of the ideological devaluation of the black race”.⁷⁰ But African philosophy has moved far beyond this period of establishing or justifying its existence: and thank God it is widely accepted today. But as we pointed out earlier, there subsists a perennial confusion in the being of the African that reminisce the colonial situation in the contemporary Africa. As such, the contemporary task of African Philosophy should adopt the hermeneutical approach; that is, to further disengage the African from neo-colonial clutches by tackling existential realities within Africa. The existential circumstances and people’s historical past generally exert much influence on their thinking, values, social expectations and attitudes. The truth of this signifies the

urgency and importance of this emancipation. However, this is not merely a theoretical exercise but accompanied moral-practical justifications. Hence this emancipation should comprise not just European but also American, Asian and otherwise; as the uncritical imitative spirit of the African or what Okolo calls 'Consumerism',⁷¹ is so obviously reckless. Here, we must state that the African should bear most of the blames for his present condition owing to the fact of indirectly desiring to replicate past colonial experiences at the present, thus, permitting the colonialist control over him. He has for long blamed others for much of his confusion, yet recent happenings on the continent turn the accusing finger on him. As such, the rationality debate at the present, -a process at the basis of our discussion- pitches the African against himself. Okolo posits that the contemporary African "is his own enemy".⁷² Otherwise, why is it that some small countries in Asia and south America, that shared almost similar experiences with most African countries have shown signs of improvement, yet most African countries are still besieged by socio-political upheaval, stunted economy and insecurity? Or is Africa the only continent under the perceived influence of western powers? Seen from this perspective it becomes important that the African needs to defend himself from himself; that is, precipitate his identity from the stifling acquired influences in him. This requires a hermeneutical approach: a sustained self-examination, self-critique and clarification of long standing existential status quo. Achebe notes that the problem of the black man lies in leadership,⁷³ and this quickly brings to mind the confusion that engulfs politics in Africa. Most of African countries still maintain colonial ideologies in form of long term dictatorial regimes. What Fanon implies when he argues that the colonized envied the power enjoyed by the colonialists and easily wants to occupy the positions they had left behind. The increasing number of rebellion, conflicts and guerilla warfare on the continent are testimonies. As such there is need to re-think politics in Africa and institute re-orientation for her leaders. As a start, the idea of life-long leadership should be relinquished, since it signals the persistent dominance of colonialism in contemporary African life. Leadership should have a term as is obtainable in a democracy. Though Ramose sees propagation of democracy as manifestation of the will to dominate on the part of the west, yet its practice has proven to be more acceptable than most other forms of government. At least it should be adopted to suit the existential realities of each African nation while still retaining its basic features. This would give Africans the right to self-determination, which is reminiscent of the traditional status quo before the advent of colonialism. In the traditional Igbo society for instance, much power was vested on the people, hence such dictatorial leadership was hardly permitted; no individual had the final say on any issue. Rather issues were publicly debated and varied opinions given hearing before decisions are taken. This gave them say on what is obtained about in the community. It should be understood that with the current idea of globalization, democracy has become inescapable for the citizens of the world; so the black man is left with no other option than to adopt it to suit his existential situation and improve his socio-political condition.

Economy and its implementation is yet another area where the African constitutes his own stumbling block. It is well known that African countries constitute the bulk of the poorest nations of the world; a reason they continuously rely on aid or borrowing to survive. Scholars like Rodney and Ramose argue that this situation bites hard on Africa because she was forced into money economy which she did not plan for nor has control over through Africa-Europe contact. And "there was no way such a cultural encounter was going to leave Africa raw and intact be it in life or thought".⁷⁴ However, the truth is that Africa is here now, and history cannot be reversed but a position can be taken therein.

Hence, there is the need for Africa to formulate her own economic basis and path to growth from this point of realization. That is the path other emerging economies today had taken. Such economic path should be uniquely African and not some recreation of western ideals garbed in African cloak, which experience shows has increased her level of confusion, poverty and dependence. In other words, it should be situated within lived experiences of the African, though important western policies may be incorporated to give it a face lift and in tune with the period. Economic life of the traditional society centered mainly on the land; hence, economic policy that maximizes the use of the land could be a starting point since Africa is blessed with vast rich lands. This brings to mind the idea of diversification of national economy especially for countries like Nigeria. In the Nigerian traditional communities, persons were mainly black smiths, fishermen, hunters, carvers, leather workers, wine tapers and distillers et.c. These are areas that could be upgraded through the introduction of modern equipment and orientating the African on recent techniques, to improve standard especially with respect to foreign exchange. Lastly and very necessary, is to emphasize the fact that the success of all this depends on implementation, which is where the African needs to defend himself most from himself. Many laudable policies fail because of poor implementation. Africa is impoverished because of her numerous insincere and self-serving leaders, who legislate from the perceived positions of the colonial past. Therefore, until our leaders learn that being human and indeed African implies leaving the world better for the future generation, the question of African humanism and its contributions to the universal world order will still linger on.

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