

INTERCULTURAL PHILOSOPHY AS THE HALLMARK OF THE UNIVERSALITY OF PHILOSOPHY AND THE ESSENCE OF HUMANITY

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Abstract:

Philosophy is not just the mother of all disciplines but a universal enterprise that is not the prerogative of any culture. This essay is aimed at presenting and defending intercultural philosophy as the hallmark of the universality of philosophy. The thesis of this essay is that philosophy is universal and not limited to any particular culture. It is the intercultural nature of philosophy that made it universal. Despite the existence of philosophy in different cultures of the world that creates particularistic perspectives of philosophy, it is argued in this essay that philosophy is primarily universal and as such intercultural in its essence. It is emphasized that the universalism of philosophy is not tantamount to globalization because intercultural philosophy has intercultural competence entrenched in it, globalization on the other hand has cultural imperialism inherent in it to a large extent. Dialogical research method is utilized in achieving the aim of this essay, in the final analysis the universality of philosophy in its intercultural nature encompasses different dimensions like the historical, ethical, and other dimensions that buttress the intercultural nature of philosophy.

Keyword: Intercultural Philosophy, Humanity, Globalization, Universalism, Culture.

Introduction

Intercultural philosophy is an approach to philosophy that emphasizes the combination of influences from different cultures. It represents the convergence point of different philosophical traditions, such as Western philosophy, Asian philosophy, and African philosophy.

Philosophy has its origin in the act of wondering, Socrates acknowledged this in the *Theaetetus* “for wonder is very much the affection of a philosopher; for there is no other beginning of philosophy than this...” (Jowett 385). More succinctly it was held that “the pathos of astonishment thus does not simply stand at the beginning of philosophy as for example, the washing of his hands precedes the surgeon's operation. Astonishment carries and pervades philosophy” (Heidegger 81). Human beings irrespective of their race, gender, tribe or any other means of differentiation have always had a sense of wonder and curiosity as an integral part of their humanness. Hence whether by its typologies such as Epistemology, Metaphysics and their likes or by its labeling as Western, African, European Indian, etc. The common denominator of philosophy in all its ramifications is wonder, to this end, wonder is a paramount path to philosophy.

Definitions of philosophy abound; different philosophers have their definitions of philosophy which can be compared to the verdict of different blind men regarding their description of what an elephant looks like. In *De Officiis* philosophy is defined as “the knowledge of things human and divine and of the causes by which those things are controlled” (Cicero 173). Plato in *Charmides*, described the philosopher as one who knows himself and is able to examine what he knows or does not know (cited in Aja 13). The scholastic philosophers tend to present a generic definition of philosophy by referring to it as the rational knowledge of things through their ultimate causes. For John Dewey, philosophy is the “criticism of criticisms (398).” For William James, “Philosophy deals with the principles of explanation that underlies all things without exception, the elements common

to gods and men and animals and stones, the first whence and the last whither of the whole cosmic process, the condition of all-knowing, and the most general rules of human conduct” (10). Theophilus Okere presented an interesting definition of philosophy which regards it as “An effort to understand or comprehend reality as a whole, and effort to discover its meaning, an interpretation of life and eventually of culture understood as the objectivization of life” (14). There are numerous definitions of philosophy which is an indication that philosophy cannot be defined easily like chemistry, biology, or sociology because even philosophers have offered different and at times conflicting definitions.

There is no definition of philosophy that is acceptable by all philosophers but there is something that underlies them:

What is generally agreed about philosophy is that it seeks to establish order among the various phenomena of the surrounding world, and traces their unity by reducing them to the simplest elements. What are these various phenomena? They are things, facts, events and intelligible world, an ethical world and a metaphysical world (Onyenwenyi 37-38).

In the long history of philosophical thought, there has always been a claim for universality although many great thinkers from the past see philosophical value only in the Western tradition and oversee what other parts of the world have achieved on their own over the centuries. Eurocentric philosophers such as Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel agree upon Greek being the only birthplace of philosophy and traditions such as Africa, Chinese or Indian are mere teachings of wisdom. Karl Jaspers' theory of an axial age repositioned philosophy in its universal nature. The theory made reference to the period from 800 BCE to 200 BCE, during which philosophical thinking evolved in China, Indian and the Occident. Jasper's theory is widely accepted by those philosophizing interculturally. In compliance with the acceptance and ubiquitous nature of Karl Jasper's theory, it is obvious that the essence of philosophy is its universalism, not the claim of any particular race or culture to be the custodian, the source and submit of philosophy in its fullness.

The Universalism of Philosophy

Philosophy is universal, universalism remains the essence of philosophy. For us to grasp universalism as the essence of philosophy, it is necessary to examine what universalism means. Universalism has its etymology from the Latin word *universalis*, which means 'general', it indicates that all diversity can be traced to a single principle that applies to all human beings. “Universalism is, therefore, a perspective that prioritizes the whole of an entity above singularity, and generality above specificity. The concept contends that some principles and norms are valid for all human beings” (Barbara 26). Universalism can be associated with the principle of *quod semper, quod ubique, quod omnibus* – forever, everywhere, for everybody – postulated the equality of all human beings, and as such equal regard is due for all cultures of human beings irrespective of their locations.

Plato and Aristotle along with other Greek philosophers were early proponents of universalism by their views regarding an ideal state where every freeman is entitled to participate in key decision-making concerning public affairs in an open debate. The limitation of their idea of universalism is that it is limited to a particular class. It was in this regard that the Roman philosopher Seneca gave much attention to the tension between those included and those excluded in the universal ideal:

Although everything is permitted against a slave, there is something that is not permitted by the common right of every living being against a human being, because he is the same nature as you” (as cited by Toennies 66). In like manner, the legitimacy of the universalism of philosophy lies in the nature of human being which is not

determined by colour, race or any form of differentiations established by any group.

It was C. B. Okolo who categorized philosophy into universalistic and particularistic types which served the purpose of establishing philosophy in its intercultural dimension, it buttresses unity in diversity amongst the various ways of understanding philosophy, for him philosophy may be universalistic or particularistic; it is universalistic when philosophical questions are general and not directed to any specific environment or people such questions as what is the ultimate reality? How can we know? What is good or right? What is freedom? Are all universalistic. Philosophy is particularistic when philosophy is a way of life, historically specific to every age and environment, shaping the philosophical experience of people. In this regard, we have African philosophy, Eastern philosophy, Western philosophy, and etcetera. Hence, it is obvious that belonging to different cultures does not make one unfit to do philosophy interculturally, rather it favours philosophy interculturally because the general term philosophy possesses both cultural and cross-cultural aspects. Despite the existence of particularistic perspectives of philosophy, philosophy remains a universal enterprise. Universalism as a philosophical tradition of thought remain the basis for interculturality of philosophy:

The general concept of philosophy possesses a universal connotation over and above particular, adjectival qualifications such as Chinese, Indian, European, and so on. This connotation gives us the right to speak of interculturality. Every philosophy must tie on another and form part of a larger whole, making philosophy a cross-cultural phenomenon... (Mall 1).

The interculturality of philosophy encompasses the fact that no culture is the culture for the whole of mankind.

Towards a Definition of Intercultural Philosophy as It Relates to Universalism

Intercultural philosophy is not a new branch of philosophy, nor is it a name of any particular philosophical tradition, nor is it an eclectic expression of different types of philosophy, nor is it a reactionary approach to philosophy. Intercultural philosophy is an approach to philosophy that buttress its essence as it is inherent in human nature irrespective of origin, race, tradition, or culture. Intercultural philosophy can be defined as an open pluralistic attitude toward the philosophical conviction that holds no single culture or philosophical traditions. It is an attempt to answer the question of how cultural manifold can be brought into line with a general universal concept of truth (Mall XII). One of the captivating definitions of intercultural philosophy is that which was given by Caleb Rosado (3):

Intercultural philosophy is a system of beliefs and behaviours that recognizes and respects the presence of all diverse groups in an organization or society, acknowledges and values their socio-cultural differences, and encourages and enables their continued contribution within an inclusive cultural context which empowers all within the organization or society.

In all, intercultural philosophy recognizes the multiplicity of human cultures, unity without uniformity and to this extent encompasses humanity in its historical, ethical, and intellectual development in several ramifications. One thing that is common among the several definitions of intercultural philosophy is the acknowledgment of the validity of the cultural expressions and contributions of the various groups to knowledge formation.

Intercultural Philosophy is not Eurocentric

One of the most popular erroneous conceptions of philosophy is that which sees it as a Eurocentric enterprise. It is based on such understanding of philosophy that the *Universal*

Philosophical Encyclopedia of 1991 only regarded Western philosophical ideas as philosophy while others, that is African, Chinese, Indian, etc. were regarded as mere thinking or conceptualization of other societies (Ma and Brakel 14). Such misunderstandings were inherent in the early works of Karl Jaspers, but he increasingly came to the realization that the idea of an approaching worldwide philosophy was unavoidable.

As an existential philosopher, Karl Jaspers tries to stir awareness of the experience of humanness via universal communication. The ubiquitous nature of philosophy has made it possible for people everywhere to be aware of their own intellectual existence. Philosophy always seeks “to realize a universality, to preserve human receptiveness, and to emphasize simplicity, increasing its potency and highlighting its unfathomable nature all through the work of an individual” (Jaspers 9). In the light of this realization, Jaspers began to make every effort to announce the various philosophical traditions that were suppressed. Jaspers was the first to devise the open concept of a 'world history of philosophy' that reached beyond the philosophical issues of the West. This offers us a passable path to a new intercultural historiography of philosophy that seems to make communication between philosophies possible (Yousefi 116). Philosophy is not the prerogative of the West alone, without communication with other cultures and paying attention to the intellectual treasures in such cultures, one cannot realize the enormous philosophical values inherent in them.

Intercultural Philosophy is not Tantamount to Globalization

Close to the idea of viewing philosophy as Eurocentric enterprise is the view that buttress philosophy as globalization. In as much as the philosophy has universalism as its essence, it is not tantamount to globalization. Even though universalism has often been used as synonym of globalization, globalization is tantamount to universalism.

Generally, globalization has been referred to as: the widening, deepening and speeding up of world-wide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life, from the cultural to the criminal, the financial to the Spiritual (Held et al, 5). Globalization is the outcome of the transnational flow of people in different works of life. This flow is what resulted in the inevitable coming closer together of the world which has further led to the description of the world as a 'global village.' This portrayal catalyzes the term globalization with several activities that poses the question of whose culture reigns in the global village, giving the fact that each nation has its own culture prior to the intensified transnational flow. Some scholars are of the view that it is the Western culture, thereby regarding globalization as being tantamount to homogenization of different cultures of the world in favour of Western or American culture as the standard of judging other cultures. The ascription of Western culture as the operating culture of globalization signals an aspect of globalization that is the crux of globalization discussion; the cultural globalization. Hence, three dimension of cultural globalization are identified; the homogenization dimension which is based on dominance, the hybridization dimension that focuses on mixture of cultures, and the polarization that entails antagonism between different cultures in reaction to the dominant culture of the globe. Once these three dimensions of cultural globalization are subjected to the ideals of intercultural competence, it would be glaring that there are several cultural drawbacks associated with the key players of globalization (Ojomah no. p.).

Intercultural philosophy differs from globalization because whereas the former provides a level playing field for the various cultures of the world, the latter insists that the “lesser” valued cultures of the world ought to be admitted into the Western way of life in the name of cultural evolution and modernization. While intercultural philosophy is based on intercultural competence, globalization is based on cultural imperialism.

In a more specific term, culture is the crux of globalization, to this end, cultural globalization is described as the process of the world turning towards the creation of a cultural unit for all:

Economic and technological transformations since the 1970s have led to an unprecedented flow of capital, goods, ideas, and people across state and continental borders. These flows, in turn, have contributed to the demise of institutions of power, notably the state. Our times are thus marked by the incapacity of state-built or state-sponsored boundaries (borders, citizenship, ethnicity) to regiment populations and affect cultural practices and identities. In short, the world is fast turning into a single cultural unit (Trouillot 4).

This single cultural unit is based on the five dimensions of the global cultural flows that define cultural globalization in Appadurai's analysis. These are ethnoscapas; the flows of people, technoscapas; the flows of technology, mediascapas; the flow of information, financescapas: the flows of capital, ideoscapas; the flows of ideologies (Appadurai 33-36). These dimensions of global flows that defines cultural globalization justifies the argument that culture is the crux of globalization. Cultural globalization is epitomized in cultural imperialism which promotes and justifies a culture as a world culture. The description of globalization as being tantamount to Americanization or Westernization hinges on fact of their dominant and the concept of a global village where its culture is the Western or the American culture. Even though one can easily argue that it is not only American or western culture that has exhibited global outreach in the contemporary world; it is important to note that the determinant of the global outreach is the influence on other cultures and the policies that government of other nations are inculcating into their system based on this influence (Ojomah no. p.).

It is worth noting that several views exist as to why globalization is neither Westernization nor homogenization but the glaring evidence of the demise of several cultures in the wake of globalization remains one of the major undeniable factors that reviews the realities of the globalization. One must also admit that culture is not static but when a changing culture is towards a direction then it is no longer the necessary change of culture over a long period but a cultural imperialism. Ultimately, cultural imperialism signals the creation of a new form of identity whereby decisions, institutions, values and structures of most culture are focused on becoming like or even changing totally to the western culture.

Taking into consideration the various limitation inherent in globalization in its cultural perspective, it is obvious that globalization does not pave way for cultural emancipation, what intercultural philosophy with its intercultural competence present is cultural renaissance in the midst of clamour for cultural dominance associated with globalization. Hence, intercultural approach to philosophy remains an ideal in a world of globalization. This is because intercultural philosophy neutralizes the negative impact of globalization to a large extent.

Intercultural Philosophy as Source of Emancipation of Culture

Intercultural philosophy as source of emancipation of culture on a neutral ground is entrenched basically in the various dimension of intercultural philosophy. Ultimately there are four dimensions of intercultural philosophy. As global communication expands, there is increase in development and cultural diversification. The first has to do with philosophy of history (Jiehou 152).

Throughout history, societies have created distinct cultures, traditions, beliefs and values, and have given birth to time-honoured and dynamic civilizations. The whole of human history if we could observe, have led to much diversity. Peace is a key motive force of historical progress. History helps to recognize that intercultural philosophy is as old as man since there is no people that don't have a civilization known earliest to them which can be traced back to them.

The second dimension of intercultural philosophy has to do with Hermeneutics (Jiehou 156). Each culture or civilization must be preserved through proper maintenance of its status quo. It is necessary to promote dialogue among various civilizations in order to increase mutual understanding which will help to promote a pluralistic philosophical basis and engage different philosophical theories. Civilizations and cultures have the characteristics of both diversity and identity. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics maintains that indigenous culture and alien one attain a confluence and harmonization of two horizons in order to promote each one's evolution through intercultural communication.

The third dimension is comparative philosophy (Jiehou 158). This ought to be an organic part of intercultural philosophy. It involves an examination of different philosophical studies that carry their cultural values as well the scholarly insight in order to achieve a special mutual understanding and communication which aims at discovering identity and diversity within distinct philosophical and cultural traditions. The differences one finds reflect the characteristics contained in each culture. Comparative philosophy can broaden various philosophical traditions and can enable them to cross beyond their cultural boundaries in order to reach broad insights about similarities or identities in diverse civilizations and promote a peaceful coexistence among varied civilizations. For instance Confucius and Socrates lived in virtually the same era, and each founded an ethical philosophy which led to Confucian and western civilizations existing today. The philosophy of Socrates provided the foundation of scientific reason and humanistic spirit for western civilization. So many similarities exist between them but each stands to represent a certain society which is part of a larger whole.

The fourth dimension is the ethical dimension of intercultural communication (Jiehou 160). A rational intercultural attitude ought to align with ethical principle of intercultural communication in order to make interaction successful. An intercultural communicative ethics affects a whole lot of areas including economics, politics, culture, and society. Under the ethical dimension, three things should be considered. First is mutual respect which has to do with equality of all cultures. Every culture in every country should be respected and their importance should be acknowledged in terms of their role in maintaining the identity of that national culture. Second, is mutual toleration, an attitude of tolerance would promote the harmony of peaceful coexistence among varied cultures and traditions. Tolerance instead of rejection will bring about mutual understanding and communication. Third is mutual cooperation. This has to do with a positive interaction and interpenetration of indigenous culture and alien culture.

The dimensions above emphasis is that different civilizations in the world should seek to carry our peaceful communication by means of intercultural dialogue thereby enhancing mutual cooperation and understanding of themselves leading to peace and development of the world devoid of cultural imperialism. It is worth noting that intercultural philosophy transcends struggles against cultural imperialism, it entails the substance of human beings in general as the source of knowledge irrespective of their cultural origin.

Conclusion

For more than a century, there have been controversy as to whether it is right to use the term philosophy with respect to no western traditions. We call those working conceptions of philosophy that have made it possible to include nonwestern philosophies 'broad definitions of philosophy' or universalistic perspective of philosophy. The reason for a broad conception of philosophy is to find a place for one's own culture and the recognition of a common substance responsible for the origin of man in philosophy. Philosophy of some kind is involved in the thought and action of every people. The unity of all human beings seems to be further affirmed by the observation that similar tendencies and qualities prevail in different religions and cultures. Despite great psychological and sociological differences,

comparisons are possible, the unity referred to here is not an abstract universal derived from similarities between races and cultures, their similarities are important. To be able to communicate, we must relinquish the idea of an exclusive possession of the truth. The absence of consensus is not necessarily the death of communication. An intercultural philosophy of unity without uniformity remains a necessary tool for cultural emancipation that accords human beings their worth irrespective of their cultural origin.

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