

CONFLUENCE OF IDEAS:

Philosophy, Tradition and the Challenges of Universal Values

INAUGURAL LECTURE SERIES 36

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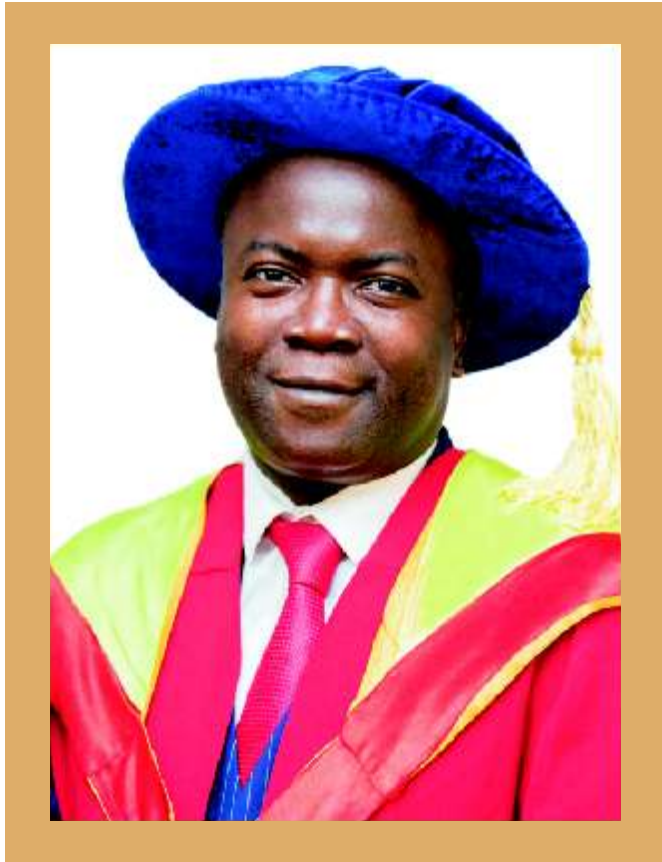
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**CONFLUENCE OF IDEAS: PHILOSOPHY,
TRADITION AND THE CHALLENGES OF
UNIVERSAL VALUES**

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Greatest Ladokites,
Gentlemen and Ladies of the Press,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

PREAMBLE

I am extremely grateful, for several reasons, to be given this privilege to deliver this lecture today. Though the third inaugural lecture to be given from my department, the tenth from the faculty and the thirty-sixth in the university; it is the first to be given in the university and indeed Ogbomosoland by a Chair in Philosophy. I am happy to give this lecture for another important reason. For someone whose life was almost terminated some years ago after a fatal automobile accident, this lecture inaugurating me as a professor of philosophy in this great citadel of learning represents what one may call serious mystery of human existence. I consider myself lucky to have survived that accident not because of my 'holiness' but because of the abundant grace of God upon my life. For this, I will eternally be grateful to God Almighty. The idea of inaugural lecture in the university is to give a succinct description of the works done in one's discipline over time to justify his chair in the department as a professor. I intend in this lecture to present some aspects of my research work as a foundation of distinguishing mark in the attainment of exemplary scholarship in my academic endeavours in the University.

THE NATURE OF PHILOSOPHY

This lecture coming from a philosophy background seeks to draw attention to the contributions of philosophy to the body of knowledge in spite of the general mis-conceptions of the discipline. Hitherto, philosophy has been conceived as a discipline that has no direct relevance to humanity since it cannot put 'bread' on the table and so should be avoided. Some even feel that philosophy is a favorite pastime of idle people who spend their time propounding worthless theories. Others

see it differently. As an undergraduate, on many occasions when I had cause to tell colleagues that I was a student of philosophy, their almost invariable first reaction was to say that "you are one of those that do not believe in the existence of God". For this group, philosophy simply means atheism. Recall St Paul's warning to the Colossian congregation: "*Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiment of the world, and not after Christ*" (cf. Colossians 2:8). This mis-conception and/or misunderstanding of what philosophy is, is not only limited to those without formal education, we find such remarks from top government functionaries and academics alike that fail to see through the stuff philosophy is made of. Little wonder most institutions hardly want to mount philosophy programme in their universities.

Given these many mis-conceptions, what then is philosophy? In the words of Halverson, philosophy is man's quest for the unity of knowledge, a perpetual struggle to create the concepts that allow the universe to be seen as unified rather than fragmented (2012:15). It is a search for order and wholeness applied not to particular items or experiences but to all knowledge and all experiences. For short, it is the attempt to find coherence in the whole realm of thought and experience (Wallace 1977: 3). Through this window, a basic set of assumptions and beliefs are formulated which underline all human activities such as politics, morality, religion, art and science, among others. On the strength of these assumptions, what is beginning to appear is the attempt to prescribe standards for assessing values, human conducts, and organization of society.

From the foregoing, we can say that philosophy operates within the ambit of human reason and seeks the ultimate causes of reality. This core nature of philosophy gives it the ladder to connect with culture and with the contemporary world. Philosophy articulates the ideas in cultures in terms of which one can interpret one's experience in a bid to evolve a platform in which every element of man`s concerns will find its proper place. It is, therefore, out of order to undermine or disparage philosophy in the process of the quest for *authentic order of things*. The quest for authentic order here involves the pursuit of meaningful dialogue with contemporary culture for the purpose of the promotion of a humanity geared toward the human person`s discovery of the self in their full integrity.

The most fundamental problems of philosophy today can be found in the anxiety of contemporary men and women and in the entire modern society in all its complexity, which elicit the 'eternal' themes of human thought, namely the problems of social order, ethnicity, racism, poverty, injustice, violence, hunger, disease, oppression and suffering, among others. And to confront these issues in a manner that avails the best possible solution for human social solidarity and the fulfillment of self-realisation, is not out of the purview of philosophy. However, in our age of the pursuit and progress of scientific *cum* technological development, it is important to say without equivocation that empirical sciences cannot respond adequately to these concerns alone. It is to the sphere of philosophy that such questions reside because it transcends and gives 'oxygen' to the exterior and other aspects of phenomena and addresses itself to the totality of reality, seeking to comprehend and explain it in the light of the ultimate causes.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, it is important to note that in spite of the skepticism towards the discipline of philosophy, the relevance of philosophy needs not be over emphasised. It should be noted that some of the attacks against philosophy are based on mis-conception or the inability to grasp the real scope and nature of the discipline. As a result, there is confusion about the real nature and the value that the discipline brings to bear on human survival and socio- political progress. When such confusions are not cleared, what you find are statements to the effect that philosophy is not relevant to human existence because it does not respond to the concerns of 'bread and butter' as if human existence is about *stomach infrastructure* alone. As Makumba puts it, "what sometimes escapes notice is that usefulness or productivity is taken as the measure of a science in particular and of human knowledge in general" (1975:15). Clearly, productivity and positive results of science play an important role in human emancipation, aspiration, self-fulfillment and social progress, but they do not certainly exhaust the depth of human knowledge and their aspirations.

It is equally important to reiterate at this point that philosophy itself or a poor presentation of it, has been partly responsible for its disparaging nature. There are even times when philosophy and its advocates alienate themselves from reality by their refusal to move from their cocoon into the domain that speaks to our individual and/or collective socio-political realities. In this sense, philosophy needs to re-organise, re-strategise and be self-critical in order to be relevant in the scheme of things. Philosophers must know that they live in a world of incarnate beings that must address the concerns of life in a way that will promote human happiness and social

solidarity. In other words, the theoretic skill of investigation and interpretation inherent in the enterprise of philosophy should not be allowed to estrange us from our contribution to humanity. Strictly speaking, philosophy must speak to social realities.

In this sense, I ask: What is the role of philosophy in the determination of the values that can account appropriately for the organisation of our daily human concerns in Africa? Does the engagement of such values with the lens of universal standard disparage local narratives? The question of what is the task of philosophy in the promotion of human values is not easy to give a precise answer as it depends on the stand-point of the scholar. I have in several essays developed arguments to the effect that human progress can mostly be enhanced if we willfully move from self-praise to a purposive quest for new horizon of life and experience (Ebijuwa, 1996, 2000, 2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2004, 2017a). This is so because human values are not cast in iron. They are dynamic in nature and subject to constant change in line with the vagaries of human struggles.

It is the above encounter between local narratives and their universal bent on the quest for a platform that would best account for the needs and interests of man in a more satisfactory manner that we will now turn. While some are of the opinion that the paradigm that best suits the African condition must be that which promotes cultural values or ideas of man, society and nature (Okolo C.1993:32), others see the project, that is the project that will provide a solid foundation for the development of African societies, “as that of the enlargement of our conception of the universe and the provision of a clearer picture

of the fabric of our concepts and a critical appraisal of our basic and sometimes intuitive beliefs” (Bodunrin, 1991:3). For the latter, “enlarging our conception of the universe involves the distillation and *the* integration of many cultural streams [...] sorted and sifted and added to until it can answer more completely than other man`s deepest need in the technological presents of the twenty-first century” (Abraham,1955:393).

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, I propose to interrogate, in this inaugural lecture, the model that sees our local values (here-after referred to as traditional) as the foundation and pathway to social reconstruction and cultural renewal. In doing this, I challenge the traditionalist perspective without glorifying any cultural stand-point. I contend that in spite of the place of culture in the organisation of our socio-political and economic experiences, the emphasis on local values will make our conceptions of reality unnecessarily insular. It is averred that a critical appraisal of our values involves the reconstruction and promotion of those aspects of our values which are in line with man`s efforts to cope with the challenges of the physical and social worlds. This position, however, should not be taken as a total repudiation of the traditionalist perspective.

It is also important to note that the above traditionalist perspective cannot be gotten from an orientation that is unnecessarily primordial. However, available evidences from the social sciences and humanities suggest that the quest for universal values might appear to many as, at first, quixotic. The claim is that there are no universal values or global norms. That is, ethical norms or values are thoroughly embedded in specific cultures. With the unfolding of events in the emerging new

world order, people are getting increasingly convinced about the imperativeness of universal values. Specifically, boundaries that otherwise served as the *locus of values* priorities in different societies are beginning to collapse. The need for such global values, considered obligatory for human survival and social progress, was never as urgent as we find it today. The existence of common needs, the problem of poverty, disease and the new conceptions of human rights clearly exhibit the imperativeness of this form of universal values.

The above appears to be a response to two isolated but related concerns: first, recall that the competitive world, in which human beings live today has made it difficult for societies to completely rely on themselves for the basic ingredients of survival and social solidarity. Second, and as a direct consequence of the above, the influence, which developed economies bring to bear on the weaker societies, so to say, is enough to pressurise them to open up boundaries with the assumption that it will positively lead them out of the woods (Ebijuwa, 2004). This presupposes a challenge – a meta-narrative of some sort. But traditionalists see this as oppressive and destructive to local norms and values, arguing that societies gain support from the claim that they are not constituted in the same way as others. To them, even if some kinds of trans-cultural values are desirable, will they be possible in spite of the heterogeneous character of human cultures and values? And how would scholars respond to the post-modernist challenge, responding to such meta-narrative as imperialistic or ethnocentric in nature? Or, simply put, will the demand for universal values not undermine local narratives?

Strictly speaking, I find the thesis of the universalists that subscribe to the claim that there are areas of mutual consent by which we can establish universal values to be quite attractive. This is partly because the claim, as it stands, does not deny the historical or cultural specificity of values or ideas, but contends that this fact does not detract from the relevance of those values to other cultures and times, and thus can be considered globally. This being the case, it can be said that human beings, irrespective of their cultural background and history, share certain basic values and ideals, the existence of which grounds the acceptance and adoption of such values.

PLATFORM FOR TRADITIONAL NARRATIVES

The thrust of the claims of the traditionalists derives from the quest for the platform that would best account for the needs and challenges of contemporary Africa in a more appropriate manner. This quest is associated with those held by some scholars in the social sciences in terms of the ways social structures influence value judgements. Value judgements, some believe, are determined by the traditions, customs, and folkways of each society, which are not necessarily shared by every society (Sumner, 1960: 446). The concern here is the view that each culture is dominated by a control mechanism, the existence of which evolves a unique set of regulatory ideas that shape the individual into a unique kind of human being. By this, we mean that each culture is seen as a set of symbolic devices for the control of human behaviour and for giving the individual a set of definitions of himself and of others. Through these devices, the value systems of each society gradually take shape and be reshaped. In the course of the development of these values, the inhabitants of each society organise their

experiences into a coherent whole. The point here is not only to show that the diversity of values is a result of social experience of different cultures, but also that these values are what characterise the identity of cultures and define their lives in ethical terms. This conscious effort of differentiation along the line of social experiences is usually used to confer an inestimable value upon cultures and to justify their claim to a separate existence. This reasoning is the source of the problems we find in Africa and many parts of the world today. For, many are wont to use the facts of cultural variation as a basis to institutionalize obnoxious rules and standards that do not have universal appeal and consequently, sometimes, affirm the superiority of one culture to another.

The result of this ethnocentric attitude in many cases is, as D.H. Munro (1967:114) says, an intolerable excess of interference. This no doubt will not only lead to the disruption of viable moral ideals in other cultures; it will in addition lead to the destruction of the mechanism for the promotion and preservation of those moral ideas and ideals. This ethnocentric attitude may be, as J. J. Kupperman points out, a combination of two factors: “absolutism in ethics” (that is, the belief that something may be right or wrong independently of what any culture or individual happens to believe), and the belief that in fact one's own culture has arrived at the correct answers to existential problems (1970:74).

The sense in the concern for tolerance is not difficult to see here. Traditionalists urge us not to speak of practices or beliefs as absolutely right or wrong, but rather to speak of them as right or wrong, relative to a culture or social context.

Presumably, then, instead of worrying about whether certain customs are really right or wrong, we should say they are right or wrong relative to a given people or culture. What follows from this is the assumption that moral values cannot be inter-culturally evaluated. Benedict puts this view clearly in her descriptions of three cultures with great sympathy and perceptiveness. She sees them as equally valid patterns of life which mankind has created for itself from the raw materials of existence (1946:278). Each is selected among human potentialities. Some potentialities, she says, can be realised at great cost but if any society wishes to pay that cost for its chosen and congenial traits, certain moral values will evolve with this pattern, however bad it may be. This cannot be assessed by any external standard.

Benedict's position raises, as Otubanjo observes, two complementary issues. First, it challenged the claim that there is a universal, independent, ethical standard in terms of which one can evaluate moral values in other societies. It proposes that the assessment and explanation of any moral judgment should be done within the framework of the society or culture to which it applies (1979:149 – 162). The implication is that the moral norms of any society are the standard. The claim then, as L.M. Himnam puts it, is that “The standard against which criticism is possible are internal to the ways of life itself and are distinctive from those which are found in other ways of life; with the consequences that there are no common standards against which two different ways of life may be compared to the advantage of one of them” (1983:341). The assumption here is that moral ideas, principles and actions are tied to other pre-suppositions in a society, which we can understand after we

have laid bare the systems of knowledge, values and symbols that structure the minds of the people. In this way, each community becomes an autonomous arbiter of its meaningfulness and justification. This presupposes, gratuitously though, that sets of such absolute pre-suppositions are equal in number to existing cultures or societies.

Vice-Chancellor, Sir, it is clear that this assumption poses a threat to the existence of universal values. In fact, it rules out completely the existence and operation of those normative patterns of behaviour, which constitute shared human practices, customs and institutions. It is the implications of, and the challenge posed by, universal values that will then be our concern. Before this, let us look at the ground for the appeal of the quest for local narratives.

ETHICAL APPEAL OF TRADITIONAL VALUES

It is imperative, at this point, to examine the reason for the appeal of traditionalism. Traditionalists reject any attempt at placing moral values on an evolutionary scale in terms of criteria of values developed outside a society. They argue that since cultures differ in the way they interpret their experiences, and they operate with different assumptions about morality, a people's moral system can only be understood by unveiling those assumptions, which guide their interpretation of experience. And since different interpretations suggest the reality of different cultural identities, no society can claim to have the final word on the meaning of values. It is important to note here that traditionalists have some merits. It is a fact, for instance, that the interpretation of human experience vary from one place to another. And that even within a society,

interpretations may vary with time and circumstances. Now, if interpretation of experiences vary in these ways, then it should be correct to say that no way of interpreting human experiences should be regarded as the given.

However, the trouble with the above view is not with the contention that social experiences vary. It is with the mistaken assumption that the diversity of these experiences and their attendant variation of values are sufficient to establish ethical relativism as the traditionalist claims would seem to suggest. This is because it is possible for one to accept the facts of cultural variation and deny such relativism without contradicting himself. W.T. Stace, for example, argues as follows while rejecting the analysis presented by Benedict:

Ruth Benedict tells us that the Dobu islanders disagree with (the) advice of Jesus Christ about loving your neighbor ...she seems to conclude that treachery and ill-will are, for the Dobu islanders, good. My contention is that the Dobu islanders are simply mistaken... People are often mistaken about what will be good for the health of their bodies. That is why we have moralists. The Dobu islanders need someone to correct their moral mistake (1950:211-212).

This is to say that no matter how profound or great the differences in the moral beliefs or our social experiences may be, it is possible to hold that some of these beliefs are true and others false. The fact that societies differ about what is right and what is wrong does not mean that one society cannot have better reasons than another for holding to its views. The question is:

how do we know which reason is better than the other? Here, we believe that a society's reasons are the results of a value system that have as its priority the satisfaction of the needs of its people and the promotion of human socio-economic cooperation (Ebijuwa, 2003:9). This being the case, it will be “counter-productive” for traditionalists to use the facts of the diversity of social experiences which express their cultural self-identity to say that their value systems cannot be evaluated by criteria of values alien to their social environment. In this sense, the appraisal of a foreign cultural activity will involve what has been called “cultural cross –breeding” (Oladipo, 1996:81). By this, we mean that we take the good aspect of a given cultural value and blend it with the good ones of another society's values; for example, the technologically-oriented way of life, which are essentially beneficial to mankind (Ibid). However, the recognition and adoption of the beneficial aspect of another culture's values should not in any way be taken as the imposition of superior values. After all, no society lives in isolation. And so cannot lead to intolerance and dogmatism as some traditionalists are wont to believe. This being the case, it will not be difficult to see that the existence of different social experiences and their associated value systems does not eliminate the possibility of cross – cultural assessment of values (Ebijuwa, 2004: 39).

PROBLEMS OF THE QUEST FOR LOCAL NARRATIVES

It may interest, you, Vice-Chancellor, Sir, that in spite of this appeal, the quest for local values has many problems, some of which are discussed below. The first one concerns the claim peculiar to proponent of local narratives that the moral ideals

and judgments of each society originate from its customs, folkways and traditions, among others. But this is based on a category mistake. I rest my position in this mistake on Kwasi Wiredu's exposition. It is true, as Wiredu says in his essay titled “Custom and Morality: A Comparative Analysis of some African and Western Conception of Morals”(1995:35), that in our everyday conversation we use the word morals to cover matters that may be brought under customs, folkways, traditions, etc. So, in discussing the morals of a given group of people, we usually refer to such things as the “*rules of marriage, sex conduct, their manner of organizing mutual aid, and their system of reward and punishment. Things of this kind will certainly reveal a lot about their values, but the point is that not all these values would be moral values*”(ibid) . There is a significant difference between customary values and moral values properly so called. Whereas, one cannot contemplate moral values without a renewed sense of universal obligation, values arising from customs may not involve this sense of universal obligation. Here, Wiredu gives an example: *An Akan living in Akan land is expected, as a matter of course, to observe, for example Akan rule of greeting. It goes without saying that other people living in other lands need not feel any such obligation. On the other hand, whether you are a Ghanaian or an American or a Chinese or of any other nationality, race or culture, truth-telling is an infeasible obligation upon you* (1995:35).

The point here is to say that while it is possible to envisage a society without the rule of greeting elders, it is impossible to have a society that is devoid of the moral rule of truth telling. On this consideration, truth-telling would be

binding on everybody. For if truth-telling were not binding and everybody could tell lies without hindrance, no one would trust any one's word and social life, to use Wiredu's phrase, would become intolerably Hobbesian.

This is the source of the mistake of some traditionalists. They tend to conflate the rules of customs with the rules of morality. So, when traditionalists say that morality is relative, what they may mean is simply that the obligatoriness of custom is relative. Strictly speaking, however, the obligatoriness of moral rules is unconditional. This unconditional nature stems from the fact that moral rules unlike customs are not conditioned responses to environmental stimuli, comprising the results of training and of rewards and punishment in a given society as we can see from the case of greeting in Akan society. Although many customs are structured to achieve the well-being of societies, and we may suppose that some do actually succeed in this. But this is not a moral fact. The reason is that there are plenty of rooms for variation in the efficiency of customs. A custom that is good in one society may be considered bad in another society. Or it may be good in a given society at a particular time without being so in another time and circumstances.

This susceptibility to being overtaken by changing time, place and circumstance is part of what distinguishes custom from morality. Yet, because there is, as already remarked, a broad concept of morality within which custom has been assumed to be a part, it is easy for people to, on the basis of observation of the great variety of customs among the different cultures of the world, conclude that morality is relative in the

sense that rightness consists in being approved by a given culture.

Another problem implicit in the assumption of traditionalists is associated with their appeal for tolerance. As we can see from the preceding discussion on the traditionalist's point about moral beliefs, their existence depends on certain other beliefs of a society, which provide the framework within which human experiences are interpreted in its social and cultural setting. As a result of this, and in particular, because moral beliefs perform certain roles in the lives of the people, traditionalists claim that they must be respected. In other words, whatever the nature of any moral practice, for example, the killing of twins as was once practiced in Calabar (Nigeria), it should be tolerated.

The question then is: if moral practices and beliefs are to be understood in terms of the role they play in the lives of the people and on that basis be tolerated, does it mean that such beliefs are free from critical appraisals? Hedenius, for example, noted that "the fact that for some reasons it is necessary to tolerate a practice P, must it be regarded as morally right" (1981:131). Many practices may be tolerated though they may be regard as morally wrong. This indicates that tolerance does not just entail the existence of a wide range of beliefs and values, and the freedom of individuals and groups to fully express their diverse beliefs, practices and life – stance, it also presupposes the impossibility of change (Kurtz, 1995:16). By this, I mean that moral values are not static. The dynamism of moral values is borne out of the fact that when such are in conflict with other values, which as Ross say, stand better, the

test of a true moral reflection (Ross: 1963:10), they are “bound” to obey the forces of change.

Here, a moral conviction that stands the test of a true moral reflection will be that the existence of which is not only suitable to contemporary social life, but also whose beliefs and practices lead to the promotion of human essence. This, therefore, explains the diversity of values and how such values that are not in line with the test of a true moral reflection can be appraised. Now, the question of the “distance” of a people's moral conviction from the promotion of human essence might pose a problem here; traditionalists are likely to argue that such judgements are personal expressions of speakers. But this cannot lead us to how moral values can be adequately assessed. The assessment of moral values here implies that one unprejudicially sees his own conception of values as that whose limitations can be reviewed when compared with others in terms of their adequacy in realising their goals. In other words, what tolerance requires is not that we endorse all moral beliefs or conceptions of values however repugnant they may be, but that we see our conception of values as being open to revision and changing circumstances. This is to show that the diversity of cultural beliefs and practices does not preclude the possibility of cross-cultural evaluation of moral values. The issue here is that even if we grant that there is an unlimited variety of mores occasioned by the diversity of values, there may nevertheless be reasons for preferring some to others. For example, it is possible to say on the score of happiness and satisfactory human relationships that some “experiment in living”, to use Macbeth's phrase, are more successful than others in terms of social fulfillment and the realisation of human aspirations (1970:103). On this consideration, it is possible for

some features of a society to be criticised and changed without necessarily bringing down the whole structure.

I recognise the influence of anthropological and historical findings on the position of the traditionalist world view. There is now a greater understanding of the impact of such findings on the moral beliefs of peoples in different societies. However, it is important to note the need for shared moral convictions if human society is to be stable. As Dorothy Emmet remarks, “there are ways of carrying a certain amount of instability and of resolving conflicts besides that of re-asserting beliefs in a single existing set of beliefs” (1970:103). This partly depends on people being able to question some features of their norms. There are situations where people are unwilling to conform to what is traditional, that is, unwilling to change what has been regarded as the given in their society. But this is not to undermine the fact that values, like culture, is not static. It is something that changes from time to time in relation with the dynamics of human needs and interests.

Here, some traditionalists may concede that values and judgments do change but most of them insist, however, that the criteria in terms of which they are assessed should not be external to the forms of life of which they are a part. This view is equally problematic. The reason is that even if moral beliefs, practices and judgments are to be located in their context, this does not mean that morality must remain so for the society to survive. Murdock, for example, rejects the traditionalist's claim that cultural elements can only be understood in the context of the culture to which they belong (1965:146). Such claim, Murdock says, is destructive to comparative studies. Also, Murdock rejects the view of Herskovits that given the equal

validity and dignity of all cultures, no evaluation of norms should be made across cultural boundaries. He rejects this because everywhere he sees people changing their moral ideas, especially ideas that are no longer existentially beneficial for their social engineering. For him:

People relinquish cannibalism and head hunting with little resistance when colonial governments demonstrate the material advantages of peace. Such evidence indicates that different cultural adjustments to similar needs are by no means of equivalent utility or practical worth. Some must manifestly be superior to others in at least a pragmatic sense if they are always chosen in preference to the latter when both alternatives are available (1965:147-148).

Here, Murdock places choice at the heart of social change and developments, believing that context-dependent value judgments do not create room for change. Tradition, therefore, on this view, is part of what he calls the “conservatism which hopes to arrest social change” (ibid).

However, the above claim by Murdock cannot be taken to mean a general assertion of the superiority of some values over others; we must, rather, take this claim to mean that there are certain values in some societies that satisfy basic human wants and needs, such as human survival and the provision of conducive atmosphere for social cooperation, better than others. This view, however, is only partially correct. For, there is more to social values than the satisfaction of basic human wants and needs. What one can infer from the above is that Murdock seems to be particularly interested in questions that concern the relative ability of different societies to satisfy

human wants or needs. Now, if question of this nature were the only ones faced in societies, then Murdock would have a telling argument against traditionalist. But there is more to know about societal values beyond their ability to satisfy people's wants and needs. One can ask about their logical structure: the way they presuppose, imply or contradict each other in a complex cultural system.

Here, traditionalism is the only appropriate approach, for our concern is with the intrinsic meaning of cultural values. The meaning here represents what the people in a given culture do, in fact, think, believe and aspire to. “Their ideology is forged in specific socio-historical circumstances and takes specific forms”. And this can be grasped by looking at cultures in their own terms, in their logical relations with each other. But this is the source of the problem. Cultures are not so perfectly integrated to warrant such holism. Our point about traditionalism thus far does not contain any claim that a people's culture is impervious to the outside world. In fact, as Lawuyi argues, to say that values are context –dependent is to create the illusion that we know everything about man and his environment from the knowledge of ourselves (1992:47). This is because cultures do overlap and societies with different cultures do interact with and influence one another. On this consideration, we cannot legitimately talk of any form of moral valuation that is peculiar to a society.

Vice-Chancellor, Sir, the above is suggestive of a kind of cultural convergence, a diffusion of ideas indicative of the existence of the possibility of cross-cultural universal standard for the assessment of values. By universal values, we do not by

any means conflate it with absolute values. Let us quickly clear this conceptual confusion.

UNIVERSALISM AND ABSOLUTISM

The reference here is to the tendency to confuse the claims for the existence of universal values with that of absolute values, thus assuming that the rejection of absolutism automatically translates to the rejection of the ideals of universal values. Although, it is possible to relate universalism to a version of absolutism, the two doctrines are not the same. Here, we identify two senses of absolutism. In the first sense, it could mean that some moral norms (that is, specific moral rules and standards) are justifiable on grounds that can be established by a cross-cultural method of reasoning, which can be said to correctly apply to the conduct of all human beings. This sense of absolutism may simply be equated with universalism. Unlike this sense, absolutism in the second sense asserts that there is only one 'eternally' true moral code, which applies impartially to all human beings. Absolutists are not of the view that their own moral code or our own is the true one. All they claim is that whatever the true moral code may be, it is always the same for all men in all ages and in all circumstances. In other words, the absolutists recognise as a matter of fact that what people consider right or wrong may vary from society to society. But they insist that what is right is the same everywhere. From the fore-going, it appears to me that this sense of absolutism has lost most of its hold.

The distinction between the two senses of absolutism is significant because it is possible for some people to mistake universalism with absolutism in the second sense. Morality

needs not be absolute in order to be universal. Indeed, there are moral norms that apply to everyone irrespective of the diversity in cultural expressions. In other words, unlike the doctrine of absolutism, moral universalism allows for legitimate or justifiable exceptions. Let us explain this using P.W. Taylor (1975) as our riding horse.

Suppose we think that in almost all situations of life, it is wrong for one person to take the life of another. Suppose, further, that we hold the rule "thou shall not kill" to be a universal moral norm, believing that it applies to all persons in all societies. This would mean that we are moral universalists with respect to this rule. "Now suppose that we also think that there are very unusual conditions which, when they occur make it permissible for one person to kill another. We can say, for instance, that in a situation when a person's only means of defending his life and that of others from, say a 'Pharaoh', who wishes to carry out a policy of systematic genocide is to kill, it will not be wrong to kill him. In this case, our rule against killing would be expressed thus: it is wrong for anyone in any society to take the life of another except when such an act is necessary for self-defense or the prevention of systematic genocide" Taylor (1975: 20). The point is that whereas it is possible from the perspective of universalism to have a reasonable exception in the formulation of moral rules especially when they concern the preservation and promotion of humanity, absolutism in the second sense does not create the window for any exception. For example, in obeying the moral rule that killing is wrong, a strict absolutist will not kill and, therefore, prevent the Pharaoh from carrying out his policy of systematic genocide. The significance of the notion of exception above is based on what has been called the

humanistic ethics in universalism. The focus of this ethics is on human well-being. As a doctrine that is man-centred, humanism is a human construction used in the interpretation of the world and the furtherance of human purpose, regardless of the accident of birth, colour or historical conditions.

Vice-Chancellor, Sir, what is the basis of this conception of universal values? Before answering this question, it is significant to ask why the need for this trans-cultural ethics is imperative now, especially when the demand is coming from an African scholar who, at least like many, should be agitating for values that are culture-specific to promote the frontiers of the continent from the incursion of Western bombardment and/or meta-narratives.

ETHICAL APPEAL OF UNIVERSAL VALUES

The need for universal values is significant now because the existing values in many African states and other continents in the world are inadequate for the survival of the society and the promotion of human solidarity and happiness. This is apt as events in Somalia, Libya, Burundi, Algeria, South Sudan, Republic of Congo and of recent the incidence of the North-eastern part of Nigeria, to mention a few of the crises-ridden regions in Africa, remind us of how desperate an enduring and workable solution to the problems bedeviling Africa states has become.

For some, the crisis can be seen from two perspectives. A section is of the opinion that the crisis in Africa is a product of the uncritical acceptance of Western political structures, institutions and values. This is so because these systems and values, as Anke Graness says, quoting Kwasi Wiredu, “are

inadequate for the needs of the artificial constructs of African nations and their multi ethnic structures, as the abuse of the multi-party system or the prospering corruption in most African nations show” (1996: 77). Uroh see the above ideology as a consequence of a more serious issue of injustice and subjugation (1998: 18, 2007; 45). For him, the crisis of Africa emanates from the long years of colonial rule and domination – a process that led to the dislocation of the socio-political and moral values, which hitherto served as a vehicle for social cooperation and cohesion in many African societies. The point of the erosion of African values was to put the people of the colonies under a form of control that would make them unable to question the sharp practices of colonial activities and the assumption on which they were based. To do otherwise, for the colonialists that were in charge of affairs as at that time, will amount to formulating policies that will “mould one citizenry from the many peoples, which will lead to the development of new colonial territories”. Hence, they adopted policies that sufficiently disunited the people. This created a new sense of communal identity for the people where none existed, and provided a new symbolic and ethnocentric focus for each group. This did not only compound the task of welding diverse elements in each colony into a coherent whole; it also became the source of many life-threatening conflicts which were to proliferate, and consequently impede the development of values that serve as instrument for social progress and human solidarity. Colonialism, therefore, widened the social distance among the communal groups, and consequently reinforced those values that led to general loss of orientation of the people. The result of this loss of orientation is partly the reason for the denial of universal values. I will explain further. The claim is

that the socio-cultural and moral crisis caused by colonialism had made it imperative to contextualise the solutions to solving the crises, because they arise in, or out of, certain historical or cultural situation. In other words, the fundamental principles or ideals or, simply put, the moral guide of the colonised should be seen as something tied to some other pre-supposition in the societies, on the basis of which we can understand their beliefs, judgments and ideals. This is so after we have laid bare the systems of knowledge, values and symbols that structure the mind of the people. This is to say that since historical experiences vary from place to place, it should be expected that the contents and concerns of the people in different societies must also vary in some respects. For this reason, I believe that traditionalist thesis cannot be ignored cavalierly.

It is pertinent to note that as correct as this thesis might appear, it is in itself innocuous, for it rejects the possibility and sometimes the significance of harnessing the ideas, values, and institutions of peoples and societies, where it is necessary and beneficial to solve the problems of a people. In other words, no matter how profound or great our differences may be, it is possible to hold that some of these beliefs, values or ideas are true or false in terms of the extent of their adequacy as a means of realising human needs and social cooperation. The fact that societies vary in the way they organise their human activities does not deny the fact that some may have better reasons for holding their views than others. In fact, as Dorothy Emmet avers, “even if there is an unlimited variety of social systems; there may nevertheless be reasons for preferring some social practices to others” (1970:130). This is because on the score of human happiness and satisfactory social relationships, some

practices are more successful than others. In this sense, it will not be out of order for some features of a society to be criticised and challenged without necessarily undermining the social structure. In fact, that is the reason we can call to question the human rights records of world leaders, for example.

The fore-going discussion shows that human values are dynamic. They are, as Thompson says, constantly in the making in consonance with the dynamics of human struggles (1991:21). For him: Only by adaptations and adjustments of its culture is a society able to satisfy its changing needs within the context of its physical and human environments. . In this way, new inventions, technologies, ideas, values and beliefs come to be fitted into the continuum of a cultural ecosystem from time to time (ibid). At this point, those who champion the call for a context-dependent mode of valuation might argue that the fact of the dynamism of human values is not in doubt. The contention is that such change as we have highlighted should not be occasioned by values alien to the social context. This position is equally erroneous because even if the conditions of change are explicable from a different social context, it does not mean that it must be so for the society to develop. In fact, as Siegel says:

'Locality cannot be the final word in cultural authority. Sometimes local cultural practices impinge upon and restrict the freedom of members of other cultures; sometimes local cultures have obligation to members of other cultures, there is a sense in which cultures are local and separate; there is an equally important sense in which we are all members of the overlapping (set of) culture(s), and in which we not only may,

but must be concerned with cultural activities afar . . . (1989:348).

TRADITIONAL AND UNIVERSAL: A SYNERGY

From the fore-going, it is clear that no society operates in isolation, that is, societies operate in a network of interlocking relationships, the existence of which enables them to assess diverse goals and values in terms of their adequacy as a means of realising their objectives. Thus, while we may agree with the proponent of local cultural practices that local narratives may play a significant role in the explication of social and political lives, it does 'not necessarily mean that there is no possibility of its taking on a universal character; nor does it mean that its significance is necessarily tethered to its original cultural ambience. Even though the potential for universality of values would greatly depend on its viability, that is, the power to influence the socio-political and economic direction of a people, that potentiality cannot unconsciously be ruled out *a priori*, as the proponent of local cultural practices claim appears to imply.

Vice-Chancellor, Sir, we can see from the above reasoning that the traditionalists ignore entirely the historical fact of cultural borrowing in the wake of the network of interlocking relationship that characterises contemporary lives. It is known that traditionalists do not abhor the re-appraisal of cultural values in the event of their inadequacy in meeting contemporary needs and interests. It is also known that such critical engagement cannot be achieved in an orientation that is unnecessarily insular. Note that the new orientation being urged here does not disregard local narratives as such, but that we

should go beyond what we know in our locality and embrace those aspects of foreign values that will enable us to promote modern ways of thinking on man, society and nature.

Yet, it can be argued that the moment we allow cultural values to enjoy a privilege status, local values will be ruled out of court. Perhaps it is important to emphasise here that the adoption of foreign values is not meant to endanger 'home narratives'; in fact, the adoption of 'foreign values' is based on the assumption that cultures are dynamic in nature. This is why Abiola Irele said that the "the resources in ideas, techniques, and, in certain respects, values, offered by our traditional cultures are simply not adequate for our contemporary needs and interests" (1982:22). Part of this dynamism is the view that cultural boundaries are not cast in iron. Since we now live in a global village, cultures do interact and thus borrow from one another. This is a fact of our contemporary lives. But this does not mean the total acceptance of the foreign values. When cultures interact, "the reception or rejection of cultural items depends largely on the need felt by the given society on its suitability or otherwise to the already existing cultural organism" (Thompson, 1991:22). The implication here is that "the borrowing culture is only receptive to the positive aspects of other culture that suits its condition. This is to say that, although a borrowed cultural item is often itself modified to fit a local situation, all borrowing involves some reshaping of some aspect or aspects of the recipient culture" (ibid:). This sieving of ideas is what is referred to as cultural negotiation.

In the light of the fore-going, we can say that human beings, irrespective of their cultures and histories, share certain basic values: our common humanity grounds the adoption and

acceptance of such values, ideas and perceptions, as well as the appreciation of the significance of events taking place beyond specific culture borders. Now, if universalism concerns the promotion of the interest of man and human solidarity irrespective of cultures and histories, what are the conditions under which it can possibly exist?

CONDITIONS OF UNIVERSAL VALUES

One of the conditions of universal values is what I have argued elsewhere as the biological similarity of human beings (Ebijuwa: 2002 b). This is manifested in instinct and drives, leading to the development of human moral sensibilities. Here, Wiredu`s contribution is instructive. According to him, every human beings has concern for his or her interests, however we may define the concept of interest. He contends that the problem of morals arises because not everybody/society has the natural inclination to be concerned about the interest of others, but coexistence between and within cultures requires that we regulate this conflict of interest. The possibility of this regulation, according to Wiredu, rests on the fact that human beings do have or are motivated by instinct or what he calls natural sympathy for one another. (1990:15) Here, sympathy cannot be said to depend on benevolence or kindness, which is psychologically limited and discriminatory. Rather, to be sympathetic is to have due concern for the interests of others. But what is due concern? He avers that “A person may be said to manifest a due concern for the interest of others if in contemplating the impact of his action, on their interests, he puts himself imaginatively in their position, and having done so, is able to welcome that impact (1990:18). This is what Wiredu refers to as sympathetic impartiality, which is common

to all non-brutish societies. The basis of this sympathy, according to him, can be found in the fundamental biological similarity of beings. As it stands, this view can be used to assess human cultural activities or systems of mores where human lives are considerably dehumanised, since only a few of us (if any) will be prepared to be dehumanised were we members of such a group.

Now, since it is not the case that we are all constituted in the same way, we should not misunderstand the full import of the meaning of sympathy. Sympathy could be passive or active. When it is active, as Maclagan says, we have a practical concern for the interests of others; passive, when we merely feel with others (1960:35). The latter, as Maclagan further says, has a distinctive characteristic of the human mode; i.e. it involves consciousness of others as experiencing the subject. This is the case of feeling oneself into the experience of others. But sympathy in the active mode seems to be a natural gift which, from our human understanding, may vary from one person to another and from place to place (Ibid: 41). That is to say, as a factor in the explication of human social action, passive sympathy would not be accepted as a moral ingredient. Now, because passive sympathy is a natural capacity, it can be inhibited in some cases by environmental constraints. If this is so, then we would not be out of order to say that we can control our excesses or personal obsession or, to use Maclagan's phrase, *passive sympathy flowers in our daily human experiences quite naturally*. Is this also the case for the practical concern for others? I think so, because how is it psychologically possible to feel oneself in the experience of others without having some modicum of practical concern for them? There seems to be

some measure of connection between the two. This is so because once we agree that passive sympathy is related to sharing to some extent the feelings of others, then it implies the sharing in some measure in the actions, which are the manifestation of those feelings. Be that as it may, we are all aware that there are different kinds of natural capacity. Some may be more relevant to moral action than others, but among the relevant sorts of characteristics, the capacity of practical concern has the advantage of being, if not equally, at least broadly distributed. This is responsible for the reason we see sympathy as a necessary moral element in the explication of human behaviour within and across cultures.

The universalisability of human rights arising from the United Nations Declaration in 1948 is another milestone in the evolution of human ethical consciousness. This is so because the declaration took the idea of human rights as basically relating to human beings *qua* human beings and not necessarily something that can be discussed in response to circumstances. The reasoning here does not undermine the nature of rights in different societies, for, we are aware of the fact that the existence of the different conception of human rights depends on the assumption of certain beliefs of a society, which provide the framework within which human experience is interpreted in its socio-cultural setting. We are not disputing this obvious fact. The trouble, rather, is with the fact that while it may be legal to torture in some societies, it does not mean that citizens of those societies do not have a right not to be protected. In other words, this right may be violated at any time by their legal authorities. But the right is still a right. What we are saying here is that a person's right not to be tortured is a right that all human beings

have irrespective of the society one is from. And this is the reason when anybody's right is violated, it can be subjected to the scrutiny of world opinion (like the gruesome murder of Ken Saro Wiwa and nine other Ogoni activists by late General Sani Abacha of Nigeria) when that treatment violates widely recognised standards of respect for human rights. In other words, the existence of these 'recognised standards' of human rights by member states of the United Nations is a clear indication that human beings share a certain common moral ideals, the furtherance of which has come to be conceived as an over-riding obligation upon everybody within and across societies.

Beside the above, there is also the existence of certain common human needs, the pursuit of which generates common moral ideals. It is a fact of human history to say that man is by nature a gregarious animal. Part of this is to say that man as a social being must live with one another in a society. That is, he is a being in relation. Now, because man is created in such a way that his needs are many and varied to the extent that he alone cannot meet them, it follows, that he, of necessity, needs others to survive. Because man socialises, he inevitably loses his 'individuality' in a way that his life becomes influenced by the action of others around him. One implication of the relationship of men in a state, which in fact, issues from the fore-going, is the need for social organisation. This becomes pertinent because when men socialise in a state, there is the inevitable fact of the possibility of conflicts. If this is so, it becomes imperative for some independent bodies to regulate such conflicts. There is no society where the practice of the regulation of human conflict is absent. Kai Nielsen (1966:534) is, therefore, right when he says

that “there is no society that does not believe that it is good as a general rule to preserve human life.” In fact, there is the injunction that we ought not to take the life of an innocent being, which is the hallmark of the moral value of the sanctity of human life that has gained expression in the moral lives of all known human societies.

UNIVERSALISM AND HUMAN RIGHTS DISCOURSE IN AFRICA

Vice-Chancellor, Sir, the attempt thus far has been to show that universalisation of values is possible in spite of the existence of certain obstacles that may obstruct its evolution and maintenance. We observed that that these obstacles are by products of certain “cluster of distorted legitimating beliefs” (Nelson, 1987:112), which provide us with false images of ourselves and social consciousness and the causes of the various confusions we find in many societies in the world today. To overcome these confusions, we have said that because societies do not operate in isolation by virtue of the interconnectedness of the world today, no context-dependent explication of values will be sufficient to meet the needs of any particular society.

However, one area where these false images and social consciousness have made the attainment of universal values difficult, if not impossible, is the area of human rights discourse in Africa. Scholars (Pollis, 1982; Khushalani, 1983; Bodunrin, 1987 and Ake, 1989, 1994) have argued that the peculiarities of African socio-cultural and historical conditions had made it imperative that the platform against which human valuation should be measured must be constructed to reflect the form of

life of the African condition. In other words, it is argued that whatever criteria we employ for the judgment of human rights, which is anchored on the claim that there are fundamental moral principles and ideas about man irrespective of culture or race ought to share, may not be applicable to the African condition.

In the light of this, therefore, I consider the above position wrongheaded because to assert that we can explicate socio-political and economic actions on the basis of self-knowledge is to deny oneself of the indices of progress. In what follows, I present arguments to prove this point.

CONCEPTUALISATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Let me begin here by explicating the notion of human rights and the traditionalist challenge to its universal applicability. By human rights, I mean rights, which are “based on the assumption of a natural law that posits that there are certain immutable rights that belong to man everywhere and which, in virtue of man's humanity should be secured and guaranteed to everyone” (Jinadu, 1980:9). Such rights, as Cranston says, are not rights which derive from a particular social context, they are rights which belong to man simply because he is a man (1973:7). Thus, if such rights exist, one could not be denied of them irrespective of culture or race. This is to say that human rights are inalienable. But there is the need to distinguish this from rights which belong to special categories of human beings recognised by the Vienna Declaration such as women, children, minorities, indigenous people, disabled persons, refugees, migrant workers, the extremely poor and socially excluded from the Universal Declaration as stated above. Indeed, Michael Freeman rightly observed that some human rights are

simply by definition universal: for example the right not to be enslaved. There are other human rights, which he says are potentially universal: those that are activated by certain situations (for example the right to fair trials) and those that are activated when human beings meet some criterion (becoming an adult) (2009: 101-102).

Against this background, some have argued that talks about human rights are monstrous fictions, which inspire false ideas and vain expectations of equality (Burke, 1987:10), and as such should be seen as metaphysical views that do not correspond to reality or at best can be described as a rolling stone that gathers no moss. The assumption here is that human rights grow with the development of human moral consciousness. Since human consciousness itself develops in response to human needs and predicaments, it is not out of place to say that human rights are not inalienable. Peter Bodunrin summarises the above view in the following manner:

. . . there are no natural human rights which human beings are automatically conscious of by reason of their humanity, that it is not the case that certain races of humanity are by nature conscious of these rights whilst others are ignorant of them, that discussions of human rights are not the results of abstract thinking in any way necessitated by existential considerations (1987:89).

Here, Bodunrin's view is a representation of the claim that human rights are relative to circumstances. The tension between universality and those that push for the recognition of difference based on circumstances or social condition in the concept of human rights was expressed in the Vienna

Declaration, which affirms the universality of human rights, but avers that we also recognise the “significance of national and regional peculiarities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind”. However, some have consistently argued that the claim to different historical condition as a criterion of valuation is a form of device used by scholars to excuse societies from keying into international human rights covenants – the bases of which some political elites have used to justify violations of human rights on several occasions. Let us now x-ray this position clearly using Claude Ake as our riding horse.

Claude Ake and Social Relativism

First, let us recall that the main gist of the above position is the rejection of any universal conception of human rights or what some have identified as a meta-narrative, which imposes alien values on other culture. The idea is that whatever criteria we employ for the assessment of human rights in Africa should be relevant to their social conditions. Hence, it is argued that some fundamental moral principles and ideas about the nature of man, irrespective of culture, ought to share may not be applicable to the African experience. As the argument goes, the fact is that the Western conception of human rights emphasises individual rights whereas what is paramount in Africa is group identity. What this implies is that irrespective of how values are constructed in Africa, what is paramount is that individuals perceive themselves in terms of their group identity. Who a person is, as Pollis avers, is “conceptualised in terms of kinship system, clan, the tribe, the village and whatever the specific cultural manifestation of the underlying world-view” (1982:16). This indicates that individual finds his worth within

the community to which it owes a number of obligations and duties (Khushalani, 1983:21). Supporting this view, Claude Ake avers that:

Africa is not yet a market society except in its urban enclaves. In the average over sixty (60) percent of the population of Africa is rural, mostly peasants engaged in subsistence farming. Rural society in Africa is still largely communal (1994:4).

In other words, for Ake, *being* is still largely communal as are interests in African societies. Here, the privatisation of interests is meaningless and pernicious; it is meaningless in that the communal factor is the essence of the particular existence and pernicious in the sense that such privatisation would imply the dissociation of persons from the context in which morality and integrity are possible (1994:4). In this sense, the idea of freedom, indeed human rights, is embedded in the realities of communal life thus:

People worry less about their rights and how to secure them than finding their stations and its duties and they see no freedom in mere individualism. Their sense of freedom is not framed by tensions between the individual and the collectivity or the prospects of securing immunities against collectivity. Nor is it defined in terms of autonomy or opposition but rather in terms of cooperation and in the embeddedness of the individual in an organic whole (Ake, 1994:5).

The point Ake is making is that rights associated with individual as stated above is not concrete in relation to the African condition since African consciousness is associated with non-automised social structures and mechanical solidarity

(1989:90). So stated, the attribution of abstract rights to individuals will neither make much sense to Africans, nor will these rights be relevant to his existential conditions (Ibid). This is so, as Ake further puts it, because the idea of human rights, which is essentially Western, has initially an ideological representation legitimised by values which are alien to the African experience and in the service of interests irrelevant to Africa (Ake, 1994).

The idea of human rights, according to Ake, presupposes a society of legal subjects conscious of their separateness and their particular interests and anxiousness to realise them. The legal right is a claim, which the individual can make against others or society to uphold this claim. The values implicit in all these are clearly alien to traditional African societies. This is because Africans put less emphasis on the individual and more on the collectivity and so we do not allow that individuals to have any claim which may override that of the society (Ake, 1994).

In addition to the above, the Western conception of human rights stresses rights, which appear not to be very interesting in the context of African realities. Even when they are interesting, their salience is questionable. There is, it is argued, much concern about the right of peaceful assembly, self-determination, free speech and thought, fair trial and so on. The appeal of these rights is in the words of Ake, sociologically specific (Ake, 1994). It is only a person with “full stomach” that can pursue these esoteric aspects of self-realisation. The point being made here is that abstract rights attributed to individuals do not make much sense to people in Africa. If

rights are to be meaningful in the context of people struggling to stay alive under very intense socio-economic and political conditions, they have to be tangible and relevant to the conditions of existence of the people to whom they apply. The implication of the above is that human rights can only be constructed within specific socio-cultural context; they are not universal. This does not only connote the denial of a cross-cultural understanding and evaluation of human rights, it also shows that the rights of individuals in the society are determined by what Chattopadhyaya calls “the practical conditions of each society” (1980:187).

Let us now succinctly examine the above view by first noting that it is not totally correct to say that African societies lack the sense of individualism as Ake would want us to believe. African societies have undergone fundamental transformation in their analysis of issues to limit their thoughts and practices to “full stomach” politics in their understanding of what will make their social functioning in the society worth-while. In fact, the transformations in African societies have even moved more in the direction of individualism since the advent of colonialism so much so that those factors that led to the philosophy of human rights in the West are very much present now in Africa. It is also important to say that it is doubtful whether the traditionalist conception of human rights posited by Ake and others can be sustained, for even when we accept the facts of the variation of values, we still would have to admit that there are some reasons for preferring some values to others. One of these reasons is the degree to which the acceptance of such values enhances the realisation of goals and the fulfillment of human

aspirations. Clearly, societies vary in the way they organise their activities, and thus operate with different assumptions of norms and criteria of judgements. In this respect, norms are said to be the product of the prevailing cultural conditions of each society that provides the platform for the assessment of the daily activities of human actions and by which their identity is defined in ethical terms.

CULTURE AND IDENTITY

Now, if our experience of the development of human values in Africa is anything to go by, it is clear that we cannot achieve much without an appreciation of our unique identity, that is, those characteristics that belong to a people that make them different from others. This appreciation is required as a means to securing the commitment and self-confidence thereof that will enable us achieve our goals in a self-directed way. To see how this is possible, it is imperative to discuss culture as a factor in the sustainability of human values and social integration.

The first step in this direction is to see culture as that complex whole which as Wiredu avers, “goes beyond art, song or other symbolic resources and dance to include everything that is connected with a people's way of life. It is seen in their worship and courtship; in their way of investigating nature and utilizing its possibilities, and in their way of viewing themselves and interpreting their place in nature” (1980: 10). Be that as it may, since the interpretation of a people's world-view is a constant phenomenon and subject to variation by reason of the influence of the prevailing international trends and increasing cultural contact, it follows that a people's cultural activities, and by implication, their identity cannot be static. As a dynamic process, aspects of their cultural practices

and beliefs, which are considered to be anachronistic or inimical to societal socio-economic progress in consonance with the dynamics of societal needs, interests and human progress are always in constant flux.

The above conception of culture enables us to see the contributions of culture to human development and the place of culture in the shaping of the identity of individuals and societies. Conceived as a people's way of life, culture could be described as the regulator of the activities of a society. And by so doing, it creates order in the society. This is to say, following William Abraham, that not all aspects of social life are regulated through State intervention. Yet the existence of social order in any society requires that those aspects that are beyond state regulation are in need of some form of moderation by culture. Abraham puts it that “*By uniting people in common beliefs and attitudes or at least in tolerance for certain beliefs, actions and values, culture fills with order that portions of life which lies beyond the pale of state intervention*” (1962: 27).

As the regulator of social order in a society, culture creates in the consciousness of the people some sense of value that are common to all, and by which they can be differentiated not only in their art, dance, moral, customs and dressing, but also in their reactions to common concerns and issues, thus generating the basis for the formulation of common identity and the cooperation required in its pursuit (Oladipo, 1999:18). In this way, culture does not only create the platform for the attainment of social integration, it makes events in human history intelligible and significant. This is why culture is seen as the *fruit of history* and, in Ralph Pittman's words, articulated

through the “historical accumulation of human values” (1979:18).

From the above, it is easy to see that identities are constructed and sustained through the integrative forces of culture. It is equally obvious that individuals are not completely autonomous and self-sufficient because they are formed in relation to others who influence their values, meanings and symbols – the culture of the world they inhabit. This interaction between the individual and others who shape his world-view does not reduce or negate the inner core or essence that belongs to him; rather, his world-view is modified in a continuous dialogue with the cultural worlds and the identities, which they offer. As Anthony Giddens puts it:

The fact that we project ourselves into these cultural identities, and the same time internalizing their meanings and values, making them part of us, helps to align our subjective feelings with the objective places we occupy in the social and cultural world. Identity thus stitches the subject into the culture. It stabilizes both subjects and the cultural worlds they inhabit, making both reciprocally more unified and predictable (Giddens: 276).

We, therefore, can see that change in the identity of individuals and by extension their culture, can be linked to the influence or dialogue between the individual and the cultural worlds. This is to say that identities of individuals are not fixed. As Stuart Hall says, “It is historically, not biologically, defined” (Ibid. see Giddens: 277). Hence, identity becomes a movable feast, formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural system which surround us (ibid).

What then is responsible for this dislocation of culture and identity? The answer is a complex of processes and forces of change, which for convenience, can be summed up as globalisation. Globalisation, according to Anthony McGrew, refers to those processes operating on a global scale, which cut across national boundaries, integrating and connecting communities and organisations in new space-time combination, making the world in reality and in experience more interconnected (1992:116). It also has to do, in the words of Giddens, with the movement of the idea of a society as a well-bounded system, and its replacement by a perspective which concentrates on how social life is ordered across time and space (1990:64). These new temporal and spatial features, which account for the compression of distances and time are among the significant aspects of globalisation affecting cultural identities. Now, as these cultures are affected by their exposures to the activities of other cultures, they then become difficult to preserve cultural identities intact, or to prevent them from being weakened through cultural bombardment from infiltration.

What then is the implication of the above for our preceding discussion on the most appropriate paradigm that would best account for the manner we interpret our place in nature that would provide a path-way to the reconstruction of human values? Modern societies are by definition societies in perpetual flux by reason of cultural contact/influences or changing circumstances. This is what distinguishes modern societies from the traditional one that some are presenting for adoption in the conduct of our activities. In traditional societies, Giddens argues that “the past is honoured and symbols are valued because they contain and perpetuate the experience of

generations” (ibid: 277) irrespective of the fact of their relevance for the promotion of their needs or socio-economic survival. That traditional ideas and values are germane for the development of a society is not in doubt here. The issue is the fact of the insistence by its adherents that such ideas and symbolic resources that had been handed down for years cannot be changed because it is what they have used to conduct their lives overtime.

We, therefore, can see that it is difficult from the above to develop a critical mind that would generate the kind of ideas and activities that would lead to the advancement of human values in Africa. The recognition of science and technology as an important factor of modern development notwithstanding, the continued dominance of traditional orientation is definitely a limiting factor to its realisation. It is a clear fact that an authoritarian regime arising from the traditionalist insistence on the promotion of traditional values as Oladipo (1996: 426) has consistently averred cannot harbor the habits of thoughts (toleration of alternative ideas, curiosity, analytic spirit etc) that are important instrument of scientific development. In other words, what is left in Africa is the prevalence of the intuitive, essentially unanalytic and unscientific mode of understanding and interpreting nature and the place of man in it (Ibid, 426).

The problem now is this: since Africa is still at the beginning of the ladder of development, we are confronted with the challenge of two social orientations or models that suit the African condition. The first is that of those whose orientation in contemporary African thought is committed to the “discovery of genuine African ideas and thought systems free from foreign

values”. This group is pre-occupied as earlier highlighted with the promotion of the peculiarities of African culture. They reject attempts to examine aspects of their culture in terms of certain logical or scientific criteria, which they associate with the Western societies.

TRANSFORMATION OF HUMAN VALUES IN AFRICA

The question is this: does the call for proper understanding of human values imply that such values are free from external assessment? For example, the fact that for some reasons, it is necessary to tolerate a given human value or belief does not result in the calculation that those who abstain from forbidding or condemning it must regard it as morally right (Ebijuwa, 1996:78). In fact, what tolerance requires is not that we endorse all actions or social practices, however repugnant they may be, but that we see our values, social practices and beliefs as being open to revision. In other words, we should, in the words of Oladipo “. . . see our conceptions of reality, modes of knowing, among others, as pre-suppositions whose limitations can be reviewed when compared with the presuppositions of other forms of life in terms of the extent of their adequacy as means of realising our objectives” (2000:4).

The point here is not that re-appraising human values, beliefs and practices is to do away with them. Rather, the belief is that through critical analysis, we are able to subject such values and social practices to the searching light of criticism and thus “likely able to promote the kind of self-understanding that would provide some basis for determining the kind of socio-cultural reconstructions that would be required to attune Africans to changes in his environment and their existential demands” (Oladipo, 1996:424) If the above is all that re-

appraising our values and practices is about, then it is difficult to achieve this through an orientation that is based on the insistence of traditional values. Given the fact that “the basic and fundamental fact in African today is the misery the continent is immersed in and the varied struggles . .

.”(Serequeberhan:1993:98) therein, and the fact that the world today is connected in a network of interlocking relationship, then Africa's development cannot be achieved by the reliance on what we believe, think or practice. The kind of critical engagement that is being urged as an alternative to mere reliance on traditional values is that which does not disregard traditional values as such but rather sees it as a dynamic phenomenon. This is to say that culture is “constantly in the making in consonance with the dynamics of human struggles” (Oladipo, 2000:4). As a result, it is subject to constant re-evaluation, depending, of course, on the nature of our socio-economic realities and the goals that we have set for ourselves. In other words, it is only by “adaptation and adjustment of its culture is a society able to satisfy its changing needs within the context of its physical human environment” (Thompson, 1992:21)

In this way, re-appraising our culture allows us, as John Lewis Gaddis wisely observed, “to see where we are and where we may be going” (1992:101). And in doing this, we would, like Thomas Kuhn showed in his classic *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, “tolerate the displacement of old paradigm, which has become incapable of explaining or meeting the challenges posed by our contemporary needs and interest, by a new one which does account for these needs and interest in a more satisfactory manner” (1962: 17-18). The shift in paradigm that is being urged here does not necessarily mean the total annihilation of traditional values, but that we should go beyond

emphasising the peculiarities of what Africans believed, thought or practiced to what will lead us out of the woods, to a critical reflection of our thought and practices which will enable us separate the good from the bad aspects of our cultural lives.

Now, if the shift in paradigm is to be significant, the reshaping of some aspects of our culture is required, especially the mental outlook of the people manifested both in their explicit beliefs and in their customs and habits. This brings us to the question of what philosophy can do to make the reshaping of African culture a reality. We have said earlier that the task of philosophers in contributing to self-knowledge and human development in Africa is the critical examination of the ideas we live by, part of which is the appraisal of the conceptual schemes that we use in organising our daily human experience (Wiredu, 1980: x). Here, we need to critically examine these concepts in line with the assumptions of our world-view. For to say that everybody has the right to vote and be voted for, and women are denied the right to decisional representation in the political sphere, is a contradiction in term (Ebijuwa, 2001:8-32). In other words, the task before philosophers is to provide the basis for determining the kind of socio-cultural and political reconstructions that would be required to attune to changes in his environment and their existential demands (Oladipo, 1996:424), as mere criticism of socio-cultural and political systems is not enough. To be significant, we need to project alternative social theories, which will reflect our aspirations and the values inherent in them. Elsewhere, I have argued that wholesale importation of Western values does not square properly with African aspirations because it will obviously be different from Africa's specific historical institutional forms of social practice (2000:91). The point of saying this is to be sure that in providing solutions to Africa's multiple problems, care

should be taken not to undermine the set of values, which inform the expressions of contemporary Africa's interests and future goals.

The attempts here should not be seen as a slip into provincialism or the glorification of traditional African cultural values. In fact, our call for a proper understanding of African's socio-historical situations in appraising Africa's conceptual schemes is predicated on the assumption that it is only by so doing that we can know where we are, where we are going, and how to get to where we are going, in the ladder of development.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, the fore-going discussion has been an attempt at providing an appropriate theoretical context for the understanding of the possibility of universal values. What makes the search compelling is not simply the heterogeneous nature of human cultures and the varying values therein (in fact, this is an obvious platitude). Rather, the urgency of this search derives from the fact that the existing values in many societies are inadequate for human solidarity and social engineering. For this reason, it has become imperative for even the relativised local values not to be impervious to revisions by standards alien to them. It, therefore, follows that outside contributions cannot be ruled out in the explication of human conduct across cultures by virtue of the changing events arising from the collapse of boundaries in the emerging new world order. Herein lies the confluence of ideas.

This is part of my story. I thank you all for coming. May the Almighty God grant those travelling back home journey mercies.

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BIODATA OF PROFESSOR TEMISANREN EBIJUWA

The thirty-sixth in the series of Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso inaugural lectures will be delivered by Professor Temisanren Ebijuwa, a philosopher from the Department of General Studies, Faculty of Pure and Applied Sciences.

Temisanren Ebijuwa, PhD, MNAL, was born in Warri, Warri South Local Government Area of Delta State. He bagged his Bachelor of Arts (1987) as well as his Master of Arts (1991) from Obafemi Awolowo University and Doctor of Philosophy (1999) from the University of Ibadan in the Department of Philosophy of both universities respectively.

For close to two decades, the direction of Professor Ebijuwa's research work has been in the areas of Socio-political and Moral Philosophy, focusing on the quest for a suitable paradigm that would best account for the organization of our social and ethical concerns in human societies. This quest involves, in part, the pursuit of a common citizenship, shared nationality and common interests and values, the evolution of which provide the bedrock for mutual co-existence and the commitment to common good and social solidarity. Professor Ebijuwa has more than fifty-four (54) publications, consisting of a book, journal articles, edited books, monograph and chapters in books. Most of these articles are published in highly rated outlets in Europe, Asia, United States of America, South America and Africa. As a fecund scholar, he has supervised over three hundred (300) Master's Degree dissertations in this

University, and several Master's Dissertations and Doctor of Philosophy thesis as adjunct lecturer in sister institutions.

He has also served as External Examiner and Professorial Assessor at several Universities and tertiary Institutions including University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Kwara State Polytechnic, Ilorin, Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu and Baptist Theological Seminary, Ogbomoso.

Professor Ebijuwa has carved a niche for himself as a scholar and an administrator. He started his carrier as an academic staff in this University in 1991 as an Assistant Lecturer. He has held several administrative positions in the university system. These include: Chairman, Faculty of Pure and Applied Sciences Sports Committee, 2000-2006; Staff Adviser, Faculty of Pure and Applied Sciences Students Association, 2001-2006; Member, Committee on LAUTECH Information and Communication Technology Policy Formulation, 2005; Chairman, LAUTECH Sports Council, 2006-2007; Head, Department of General Studies, 2007-2010; Deputy Dean, Postgraduate School and at the same time Chairman, Admissions and Scholarship Committee of the Postgraduate School, 2005-2009; Member, Board of the Postgraduate School Representing the Faculty of Pure and Applied Sciences and Senate, 2005-2016; Chairman, LAUTECH Ceremonial Committee, 2010-2012; Chairman, Local Organizing Committee Pre-NUGA Planning Committee 2013; Member, Committee of Provost and Deans 2011-2015;

and Member, Planning and Implementation Committee (PIC) Okin University, Okin Apa, Ogbomoso, 2015-till date. Professor Ebijuwa is presently the Pioneer Vice-Chancellor, Dominion University, Ibadan.

Professor Ebijuwa, through his international scholarly networking, facilitated some international collaboration in Asia and Europe on behalf of Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso culminating in the signing of Memorandum of Understanding with Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Johor Baru, Malaysia, Maastricht University, Netherlands and of recent University of London. He played a leading role in the establishment of several academic programmes as Dean of Postgraduate School, his Department and LAUTECH Open and Distance Learning Centre. Professor Ebijuwa's administrative endeavour is no doubts, iconic. He is renowned for meeting targets and consistently exceeding expectations in his interpersonal skills, problem-solving abilities and work ethic. During his tenure as Dean, Postgraduate school, LAUTECH, and Director, LAUTECH Open and Distance Learning Centre, for instance, he raised the standard of academic activities of the school by initiating ideas and ideals that improved access and scholarship, all of which culminated in the enhancement of Internally Generated Revenue for the Institution. Indeed, he is industrious and resourceful.

Professor Ebijuwa is an international intellectual who has engaged in diverse research activities in different continents, including being invited to participate in a workshop organised by the United Nations University Institute on

Comparative Regional Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS) in University of Maastricht, Netherlands in 2012. In addition, his essays have been used as Guest Editorials in several academic journals and periodicals. He has organised and participated in several conferences and workshops both within and outside the shores of Nigeria.

Professor Ebijuwa is a member of several Editorial Boards of International Journals and professional bodies. These include: *Ela: Journal of African Studies*; *IJACI: International Journal of African Culture and Ideas*; and *Africa: Journal of Contemporary Issues*. He is also a member of academic associations including Philosophers Association of Nigeria (PAN); International Society of Universal Dialogue (ISUD), Poland, World Council of Philosophy; and a Member, Nigerian Academy of Letters (NAL). He is also a Council Member of the Institute of Social Work of Nigeria.

Professor Temisanren Ebijuwa is happily married to Dr. Mrs. Adefunke Ebijuwa, and the union is blessed with three wonderful Children: Oritsetimeyin, Oritsesemaye and Oritsebemigho.