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PERSPECTIVAL DISCOURSE OF HEGEL'S AND HERDER'S PHILOSOPHIES OF HISTORY TOWARDS AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Herder is known to have disliked systems that impose universal laws on humans, also for his defense of nationalism and his concern for the cultural ethos of nations. Above all, he is known to believe that the development of any nation is within. However, Hegel avers that freedom that leads to development is recognized and practiced in modern Europe; therefore, the world's other primitive people can acquire freedom only if Europeans impose their civilization upon them. Through this imposition denies freedom to colonized peoples, this denial is justifiable for Hegel because it is the sole condition on which these peoples can gain freedom and development in the longer term. The essence of this article is to explore the implications of Herder and Hegel's Philosophy of History with respect to the development of Africa. This paper flaws Hegel's assumptions using proven facts from colonialism as well as western imposing globalism in which African countries are faced with. This paper also praised Herder's attempt for understanding the uniqueness of every culture which in turn could lead to their development. With the philosophical tools of exposition, critical analysis and prescription this work is been carried out.

Keywords: Development, Africa, Colonialism.



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INTRODUCTION

All civilizations are in theory essential for the progress of the whole, is the thought that sets Herder and Hegel apart from many other philosophers. Herder is known to have

disliked systems that impose universal values that he found empty. He is also known for his defense of nationalism and his belief that seeds of development lie within a country. However, Hegel's philosophy of history emphasizes the development of freedom and the consciousness of freedom over the course of world history. For Hegel, this development is marked by conflict and struggle, rather than smooth uninterrupted progress. Hegel gives a brief defense of the idea that *Reason* rules history. Hegel believes in the "rationality of the event". Men who pursue their private and selfish interests are contributing to the achievement of history. This justifies Alexander the Great and Napoleon Bonaparte in the conquest of peoples and nations, this also justifies the imperial era in Africa. Hegel's argument regarding colonialism is that it is only been possible for this rationality to be grasped and put into practice in Europe. Therefore, the world of other peoples can acquire freedom, if and only if Europeans first impose their civilization upon them.

Herder however rejects this kind of history that "calculates everything in the case of every land with a view to a utopian plan in accordance with unproved first principles" (413). He calls this a "foreign varnish that robs the forms of our world and the preceding world of their true stance, even of their outlines" (413). These two Philosophers have similarities and differences in their postulations on the philosophy of history; however, the essence of this work is to see how their postulations affect African development.

MEANING OF DEVELOPMENT

The term development can be considered as 'to de-envelop'. This basically means bringing out of that which is enveloped. It can also imply to bring to the fore that which was hidden. This is why Iroegbu defines it as "the progressive unfolding of the inner potentialities of a given reality" (81). Oguejiofor in his own words opines that:

Development concerns first and foremost the human aspect of society. The development of a nation is primarily the development of human personality.

And to this, all aspects of development should be subordinated. This development is in turn summarized by the development of the mind and the will. One role of Philosophy in this regard is to discuss the meaning of life and how it ought to be lived (127).

On his own part, Mbaegbu claimed that: Many scholars agree that the concept of development implies an ongoing process; this implies that, it is dynamic rather than static (109). Again, development is an all-round concept, it must be inclusive, more encompassing, neither can it be a one-sided affair.

The core areas of development can also be said to be psycho-personal development: which involves the spiritual, the intellectual, political and economic and the lastly, scientific-technological areas. For all-round and authentic development, these various areas must be truly integrated. (109). Kayode underscored it thus:

Development is not just to make the poor wealthy, but to make the poor productive. The need of the poor. . .is not relief but the release of their inherent potential for individual growth, enhanced productivity and higher social and political responsibility. This way, development turns man into an asset, not a liability (31).

The pursuit of these ideals of sustainable development is the objective of any nation whose citizens' or members' welfare guides the implementation and formulation of all laws and policies.

HERDER'S PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

Herder's *Another Philosophy of History* argues for the tolerance of different cultures and also against cultural hegemony and conquest which was carried out by European powers on third world countries in the past and also on going. Herder in his theory of history uses the image of a tree to depict the *development* of nations. This image he used along with the

allegory of the ages of man, simply linked the simple, faithful existence of the “patriarchs” to the childhood of man, and compares it also to the first growth of the great tree of humanity, the “old cedar” whose roots sustain “the whole young forest with their sap and their strength” (5). He used this to explain that “the young man is not happier than the innocent, contented child, nor the calm old man unhappier than the vigorously striving man” (31). Although Herder’s organic images and allegory of the ages of man might be taken exclusively as symbols of the unity of the whole picture, Max Rouché cautioned that they are in truth “meant to underline the equal necessity of all civilizations, not the progress of the whole” (107).

According to Robert, from Vico, Herder received two ideas that were to become the foundation of his own philosophy (657). The first of these was the idea of different historic ages, each of which evolves naturally out of the preceding age, in other words, the concept of continuity in history. “All things,” said Herder, “rest upon one another and have grown out of another”. And again: the father “has descended from our fathers” (658). This idea latter had tremendous national significance.

The second notion is that “each historical epoch forms an independent cultural entity whose various parts are integrally related to form an organic whole” (658). Applying this concept of cultural patterns to the development stages of nations, Herder argued that since each nation was organically different from every other nation, each nation ought to be master of its own destiny and development. “Every nation,” Herder said, “contains the center of its happiness within itself” (67). Accordingly, Herder contends that from the varying circumstances of nations’ physical environments had emerged national differences and historical developments. This simply means that, since no two nations had shared common environments and common histories, then no two nations could share common characters. Herder further argued that since each nationality was, created by nature via history, man’s duty was not, as the campaigner of the Enlightenment

maintained, to work for the creation of a common community of nations governed by universal, rational law, but rather to develop each nation along those lines lay down by nature and history (68).

In gallant defiance of the Enlightenment, he declared: "Every [nationality] carries within itself the standard of its own perfection, which can in no way be compared with that of others." He insisted that "we do justice to no nation by forcing upon it a foreign pattern of learning" (69). He further proclaimed that "the most natural state is one people with one national character" (70). Therefore, nothing seemed to him as unnatural as "the wild mixtures of various breeds and nations under one sceptre" (70). Herder argued that the laws of a nation are simply the necessary relations arising from the nature of that nation's geographical environment and social character. Since these factors vary from place to place, there are no universal laws-only national laws. The laws of a nation-best suit itself and only by chance can be applied to other nations.

Herder took over this relativistic position and made it a fundamental part of his philosophy. Herder tried to puncture the self-centered philosophy of the Enlightenment, and in his keenness, he seems to tip the balance in support of relativism. Herder, whose philosophy of history not only stirred the German nationalistic movement, also seems to have served as the foundation for such movements since his time. By showing the German people why their building a national culture on native foundations was not only desirable but absolutely necessary, Herder formulated a set of principles of nationalism that have generally been held applicable to all nations struggling for independent existence.

However, the way in which Herder interprets nations sometimes belies his intentions. It would be difficult for Herder to fathom how in contemporary times several countries could similarly count English or German, for instance, as their official language and yet have entirely different national characters. Roucher suggests that Herder's scheme of monolithic nations is "creationist" since it characterizes nations as "products of

nature.”(362). The ‘nation’ carries too much weight in Herder’s scheme since it defines every aspect of a man's existence. Herder equates the man with his language, his culture, and his religion (which are all presumably tied to his nation) and with nothing else. For instance, the "Oriental" can be nothing but an "Oriental," while the Greek can be nothing but a Greek. This leads him to the idea, according to Rousset and Berlin, which men can only be genuinely creative authors if they write in their own mother tongue, or alternately, that they can only be fully themselves in their country of origin (363). While it is true that language is both a substance in which man finds himself living and the primary outlet for man's expression, it is unrealistic for Herder to limit a man's true expressiveness to his own original language. Does it mean scholars doing research in English other than their native language will not perform well?

However, Herder's obsession with drawing national boundaries around all formative cultural factors is understandable considering his dismay over the popularity of the French language, customs, and fashions in Germany during the 18th century. The juxtaposition of national relativism with morality hampers Herder's logic in an obvious way: to urge nations "jealously to guard their particular traditions and to close themselves to outside influences is to approve the right to deforming specialization that the humanist admirers of the 'Greek totality and Herder, first of all, condemn for individuals" (114). Notwithstanding his statement have some positive attributes, but also its tendency obstructs Herder’s view even as he perceives history with more nuance than other Enlightenment thinkers.

HEGEL PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

George W.F. Hegel presents an unusual interpretation of world history in *The Philosophy of History*. Hegel initiated a system for understanding the history of philosophy and the world itself, often called “dialectic”: a development in which each successive movement

materializes as a solution to the contradictions inherent in the preceding movement. Omeregbe avers that:

Hegel's Philosophy is based on his logic of dialectics in which a thesis is negated by antithesis and both the thesis and antithesis are taken up in a synthesis. The synthesis thus reached becomes a new thesis which is in turn negated by an antithesis and from this conflict or contradiction a new synthesis develops. (29)

Hegel's dialectics method is the process of the movement of spirit (Geist). It is a logical system that launches the progressiveness of the spirit from abstraction to concreteness, from being to becoming. But both being and becoming are moments or aspects of the life of the spirit. At the stage of being, it is abstract but at the state of becoming it is empirical and concrete: It came to the ultimate truth about itself.

To wholly apply this model of Hegel's view of world history, it signifies the manner in which the Spirit develops progressively into its purest form, ultimately reaching its own essential freedom. To this Hegel avers, "world history is thus the unfolding of Spirit in time, as nature is the unfolding of the Idea in space" (92). Once in-the-world, spirit longs for actualization and self-authentication, to make itself what it can become.

Thus, his unearthing of the diverse stages in the developing consciousness of Spirit is a byproduct of his articulation of the development of the state.

While theorizing on the dichotomy between East and West, Hegel identifies four historical worlds - Oriental, Greek, Roman and German. In all of these worlds, the progressive series of consciousnesses of spirit has its expression while the rest of civilization looks on. For Hegel, therefore, any historical system should see Africa as a land where consciousness has not yet reached the level of the realization of any objective existence. Therefore, Africa is not among Hegel's four cultures or civilizations. It is

important to bring to the front Hegel's analysis on Africa, which involves three major distinctions;

- i. Africa proper - the terrain that lies south of the Sahara
- ii. European Africa - that terrain lies north of the Sahara
- iii. Egypt - the terrain that is connected to Asia.

Hegel regards "Africa Proper" as "the land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night" (91). He also avers that "in Negro life the characteristic point is the fact that consciousness has not yet attained to the realization of any substantial objective existence" (93). Therefore, African has not reached the level of realizing his own being; he has not yet recognized his person. In Hegel's words, the African is "natural man in his completely wild and untamed state" (93). Hegel's notion of anthropology gives a better insight into his conception of Africa. "Anthropology", for Hegel, is the study of the soul, the lowest conceivable phase of mind, still trapped in nature, bonded to the body, and barely above the level of animality. The soul is that level at which Spirits sleeps, active only within itself, at one with the environment.

He identifies a tripartite phase of the soul, namely, the natural soul, the feeling soul, and the actual soul. The natural soul is the absolute beginning of the Spirit, although unconscious, it is completely influenced by its environment. The feeling soul is the all-inclusive outcome of the accumulation of sensations - sense experience, passion, and emotion. Lastly, the actual soul is the awakening of the "I". Here the soul transcends the natural world, regarding it as objective and alien to itself. It has become thought and subject-for-itself (98). Thus consciousness According to Stace, history is actualized only when the soul has moved through these stages (439). For him, Africa has not reached the level of the actual soul. From the Hegelian perspective, African is still under the influence of nature. Hence Africa proper has no role in world history. Until it attains the level where

it can transcend the influence of the environment, at the minimal level of consciousness, Africa proper is unable to fit within Hegel's philosophical scheme.

According to Kuykendall, from Hegel's standpoint, Africa is said to be unhistorical; undeveloped spirit - still involved in the conditions of mere nature; devoid of morality, political constitution and religions (572). Consequently, he holds that there is a validation of Europe's enslavement and colonization of Africa. For Hegel, slavery causes the "increase of human feeling among the Negroes" (572). Due to his thesis on Africa, Hegel is discarded by many black scholars. His work on Africa is said to praise Ancient Greece, while it grotesquely and ignominiously denigrates Africans, whom he sees as children in the forest, untouched by the movement of history.

IMPLICATION ON AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

According to the Failed States Index by *Fund for Peace*, only three African states - South Africa, Botswana, and Ghana - are stable and developing countries, nine are considered "in danger", and the remaining forty-two states are in "critical" condition, however, none is termed "developed". Moreover, the top five failed states and fifteen out of the top twenty are African. Many theoretical reasons have been given for African backwardness in terms of development. One of the reasons for this can be said to be the effects of colonialism, which many believed have worn a new face in "globalization". This argument follows that the policies of these western powers make it almost impossible for the third world to develop: This theory according to Dietz is called "dependency theory" (751).

Hegel would have disagreed with this idea, however, from his postulations, it is justified that European powers colonize areas he considered uncivilized and pre-historical because this is the only way they come in contact with the spirit of freedom which will lead to their civilization and further make them attain development. For Hegel, it has only been possible for this spirit to be grasped and put into practice in Europe. Therefore, the

world of other peoples can acquire freedom, if and only if Europeans first impose their civilization upon them. However, a bit of confusion looms here, as it is not clear if Europeans also went through the process of slavery or maybe they did attain this level by mere chance or nature.

Due to this, Hegel has been often criticized as a racist. The accusation is not entirely unfounded, since in his *philosophy of history* he described Africa as the land of magic, myth, crude but also childish innocent violence, a land where nature prevails and spirit did not manage to raise itself beyond this primary level of existence. While his philosophy gives justification for slavery, his justification denies freedom to colonized people, however, did this just led to development?

The slave trade and colonialism were instituted by Europeans around 1445 to bring labor to the New World, where captives from third world countries, are forced to work on the newly installed plantations. Lacking a large body of healthy, young laborers, Europe turned to Africa, most notably the western coastline, in order to accumulate wealth and power across the globe, all in the name of civilization. According to Webster, from the British perspective the *phrase* initiated by Sir Fowell Buxton, for justifying colonization in Africa, was “the Bible and plough”: meaning Gospel and industry. It is believed that imposing this on Africans will help African natives and countries develop (418). Exact estimates of how many Africans were captured as slaves or killed in the process of capture are unavailable, given the duration and scale of the slave trade. However, according to Ross, calculated approximate claimed that about four million slaves were transported across the Indian Ocean (264), an additional four million across the Red Sea (265), up to nine million via the trans-Saharan cavalcade route (278), and anywhere from eleven to twenty million across the Atlantic Ocean (285). Given these mind-boggling numbers, an exact number need not be calculated to figure out the devastating effects that this mammoth population loss had on African socio-economic growth.

The focal effect that the slave trade had on African development is the detrimental loss of a significant portion of the labor force. According to Ewald, since Europeans sought after able-bodied slaves, they exclusively captured men and women between the ages of 15 and 35, with a ratio of two men to every woman (141). Frequently, Europeans would take young children in order to get them to adapt at an early age to the services that would be anticipated of them for the rest of their lives. This means that a considerable portion of capable laborers was removed from Africa, stifling their industrial and agricultural development in relation to Europe, who reaped all the developmental benefits of the trade.

Another negative economic consequence of the slave trade is the supplanting of European goods for African goods. This took several forms. Commonly, Europeans would bribe the tribal or regional leadership into forfeiting some of their subjects in exchange for commodities (153). Most often, African leaders had no way of defending themselves against the Europeans, and with the realization that their subjects would be captured either by force or through trade, African decision-makers had little choice but to accept the European goods to mitigate the loss of labor and subsequent drop in productive capacity (Egbeji 27). Some of the items traded to the Africans in these regions were cotton, dyes, and salt, all in order to "fill the holds of slave ships". As military technology improved within Europe and it became apparent that the Africans were no match for the growing powerhouses, bribery for slaves became a thing of the past and Europe instead forged its way directly into the African economy. It did so using several methods. Before the slave trade commenced, Africa and India were among the world's top cloth producers. When the Europeans initiated slavery, they began buying cloth in extremely large quantities from India and Africa in order to resell it to one another at higher prices. With a shortage of labor necessary to engage in the time-consuming and intricate process of making cloth, Africans could not match the pace at which Europeans were buying their textiles in order to meet the demand within Africa. As Ewald notes, "these inefficiencies

created a market for foreign goods that ambitious rulers could tap for slaves to sell to foreigners or to build up their own followings, thus promoting further dependency as well as undermining local industry" (104). Today the game has changed; globalization is now the order of the day, wearing the same new face and effects.

In the paper titled *Globalization from WHO and for Whom: A Tour to Reformed Imperialism*, Ikegbu and myself argued that colonialism has actually be reformed to globalization, as the exploitation and effects are still the same. The only difference is that in globalization western powers need not physically occupy countries, with open walls, democracy and capitalism; they still control and imposes universal laws on third world countries, especially in including Africa (368). With this, the gap between the rich and the poor keeps increasing, and since the world is becoming a global market, it makes it difficult for companies in African countries to cope with the big co-operation and industries of the western power (369). This for sure will always hinder the development of African economics. This proves that Hegel's justification for colonialism is antithetical to both the development of African natives as well as the spreading of the spirit of freedom as Africans are still dominated and never really free from western influences.

However, Hegel was deeply aware of the negative social consequences of capitalism, but he did not provide a firm solution for them. Nevertheless, consistent with his philosophy, Hegel approached the matter from the prism of rational necessity, leaving individual morality aside, his philosophy giving credence for the justification of slavery, colonialism and race supremacy. Hegel had specified that slavery does not 'satisfy even the most modest demands of reason', and the slave is a 'natural being' that does not live according to its concept (86-87). Unfortunately, Hegel also contested the immediate abolition of slavery in the 1820s and affirmed it as a contemporary necessity, despite this inhuman treatment of persons: 'Here, the wrong is valid, so that the position it occupies is a necessary one' (88). This justification of slavery and therefore colonialism is based on

Hegel's conception of rational freedom which, in the modern era, has Europe as its geopolitical, geo-economic and geo-cultural vehicle (Chijioke 23). Furthermore, Hegel understands colonialism as a civilizing mission, even though in his latter works he harshly condemns all irrational practices associated with it.

On the other hand, For Herder's relativist view of human culture, he believed that a cultural group has its "centre point" and can only flourish within its own gravitational sphere. This necessarily implies that every culture stands on its own centre: warrior cultures are apparently just as valuable as peaceful ones, and members of cultures that condone human sacrifice in astonishing numbers (like the traditional Efiks for instance) are no more misguided than members of cultures in which killing is avoided in ritual proceedings. This essentially means that one cannot determine convincingly what a better way to live is. Herder had argued that there is no clear "best" way, but would he claim there is no "better" way? This is one essential problem found in his philosophy.

However, following Herder's postulation, he will be critical of globalization as much as imperialism as both attempt to set universal laws and standards for nations. Despite this, it is interesting to note that globalization has its positive side; which is, it allows for cultural exchange which can help put some barbaric cultural practices under the spotlight. Also, colonization made Africans acquainted with writing and learning other unethical practices became demeaning.

Notwithstanding, we can praise Herder's argument that all nations have the seed of their own development as a plausible one. His argument that "Every [nationality] carries within itself the standard of its own perfection, which can in no way be compared with that of others" (69) is vital for the development of Africa. Since every country has its own unique challenges and opportunities which are best understood by the locales. Such challenges can be better tackled within. One example of these challenges is a system of government. Today, the western world is calling on all countries to embrace democracy.

This is against Herder's argument when he insists that "we do justice to no nation by forcing upon it a foreign pattern ..." (69).

Richard Sklar had written a paper titled "*developmental democracy*" in which he opined that western democracy will necessarily bring about development. However, the reality today is that democracy in is always a fascinating case in Africa. One can state categorically that the democratization process in Africa is 'mountain trajectory'. Today, not only democracy is going bad, but even countries are getting perverted by the globalization of transnational criminality under the umbrella of official authorities and structures. Many African scholars are now of the opinion that African countries should look inwards for their unique system of government. In my article on *Developmental Democracy in Africa: A Review*, I had questioned the idea of democracy In Africa. Tracing the antecedents of democracy in African since the early 1990s, I argued that is not is said to be and also not the best system of government for African societies (5).

Also, I had questioned why democracy is now polarized to include: Developmental democracy, liberal democracy, social democracy and so on. The truth is if democracy is actually what it really means then every democracy will necessarily be developmental, liberal and social and there won't be any need to polarize (8).

Above all Herder sees a broader picture than other philosophers of his age in that he questions the self-importance of any people, including that of the western world during his days. True development can only be attained when a human decides to see each other as been equals.

CONCLUSION

Hegel's biased view on the African people, their intellectual make-up, culture and religion as noted from his postulations, sways off the professional approach one must employ in dealing with other people of different history and perception of reality. His postulations

in the aspect of African society gave room for colonialism, encouraged slave and master relationship. Even though he holds that it is good, as it is a necessary condition before Africa can attain the spirit of freedom. Such postulation still has some relevance in today's African economy. Africa, having gone through the era of colonialism, many would agree that Hegel's justification is a foul cry. Today, colonialism and expansionism had greatly diminished but, globalization has taken the order of the day, with the setting up of the world trade center, United Nation, other international agencies regulating countries and the way in which world trade is currently been played with the help of globalization, the effect of colonialism is still felt. African countries' economics are still in bad shape according to the world index.

However, Herder's view remains plausible, this is because it sufficiently illustrates that Africans are a unique race endowed with the necessary abilities and capabilities that can be used to exploit their potentialities in all areas of their lives as human beings. Even countries and continents are known for peculiar things. For instance, China today advanced its medical outlet from their local herbs, which today have given the world a cheaper and alternate medical option.

Hegel's grave mistake in his assertions is judging Africans on the basis of the development of his European culture. Development in terms of technology and logic as Kwasi Wiredu observes is just one aspect and not the core of cultural advancement and it further means reducing the essence of culture to its properties. What is paramount is that Africans have a culture that defines who they are as Africans in relation to how they perceive reality and strives to progress in making life meaningful.

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