

Philosophical Hermeneutics on Culture for Sustainable Development

Ignatius Ifeanyichukwu Ogbodo¹, George Ohabuenyi Abah^{2*}

Abstract

In recent times, the world has witnessed rising clashes among cultures or peoples of different cultural orientations. It has been observed that in most of the cases especially those that have developed into full scale wars, development have been seriously retarded. This paper examines the interface between philosophical hermeneutics culture and religion with a view to assessing whether philosophical hermeneutics on culture can lead to sustainable development. Philosophy promises to create a suitable characterisation of the relationship between culture and religion. This paper adopts hermeneutical, expository and textual analytical methods. This paper argues that philosophical interpretative approach to culture and religion can move the society in the direction of sustainable development.

Key Words: *culture, philosophical hermeneutics, religion, sustainable development*

I. Introduction

It is a known fact that in the recent times, the world has witnessed rising clashes among cultures, especially peoples of different religious orientations. It has been observed that most of the cases that developed into full scale wars retarded development. It has also been observed that some cultural practices such as criminal masquerading, practices that discriminate against women and children prevent them from inclusiveness in educational, social, political and economic activities. These sorts of practices require philosophical reinterpretation and monitoring which can redirect such cultural practices for sustainable development. It is against this background that the authors have chosen to write on philosophical hermeneutics on culture and religion for sustainable development. This paper examines the interface between philosophical hermeneutics on culture and religion with a view to assessing whether philosophical hermeneutics on culture and religion can lead to sustainable development.

II. Concept of culture

Culture derives from Latin *cultus, colui, colo or colere*. These Latin words can mean: fostering, inhabiting, cultivating, tilling, maintaining, tending to, cherishing, worshiping, decorating and adorning. The Latin *colere* later evolved into *cultura* and *culturae* meaning agriculture, cultivation, training or taking care of

¹ Department of Philosophy, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

² Department of Philosophy, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

(Online Etymology Dictionary). Culture is the way of life of a people. Culture includes all values, customs, language, music, art, food, dress, dwellings, and dances of a people. Culture is a way of being human, of expression and of developing relationship with creation, with one another and with God. It is a particular manner of behavior of a particular group, its thought, feeling, and judgment pattern, and its mode of perception of itself and others. In the most general terms people have beliefs about good and bad, right and wrong, worthy and unworthy that they have internalized from their societies and that these beliefs and values in turn motivate the choice of some actions over others. We rely on culture for understanding these actions and motivation (Vaisey 2008, 604). What this means is that culture reveals a people's value system, their moral codes, life style. On this ground, Gadamer opines that 'the great horizon of the past out of which our culture and our present lives influence everything we want, hope for, or fear in the future (Gadamer 1975, 8-9). It is through culture that people become really human, and human life in turn translates into culture (Pazhayampalli 2004, 1160-1161). Man creates culture and culture in turn creates man. Culture is then a means to predetermined end. Thus, if culture is to create a noble individual, culture itself needs to be ennobled by allowing philosophy to heal its imperfections such that it can in turn create a perfect human person in terms of mentality attitude and disposition. Training on critical thinking ennobles the individual to lead because he has acquired the capacity analyse situations well. Plato speaks of education as a culture which the philosopher king must acquire in order to lead well. To best appreciate the culture of education, the philosopher king must assume the condition of those living in the dark or in the shadows in the den (debased culture) to better appreciate the culture which he has acquire through education. And that those who have not been led out of the shadows should have nothing to do with government (Plato, 378). According Plato education is a culture such that cut off from this culture, intelligence which is man, 'having no taste of any sort of learning or enquiry or thought or culture, grows feeble and dull and blind, his mind never waking up or receiving nourishment, and his senses not being purged of their mists' (Plato, 267). Thus, cultured implies an acquaintance with stocks of knowledge and attitudes that make up a given culture. But acquaintance with this sort of knowledge does not of itself enable one to become cultured. How then do we get culture to create noble individuals? We have to locate it philosophical hermeneutics on culture.

III. Hermeneutical perspective on culture

The term hermeneutics is from the Greek *hermeneuô*, meaning to interpret. Hermeneutics is the systematic study of texts. Interpretation of text must take into account an understanding of the nature of the philosophical enterprise as a critical activity (Rescher 2007, 2). In our context it means a systematic interpretation of culture. Philosophy itself deals with the big questions regarding the nature of human beings and their place within the wider scheme of things. It is about the logic of holding all things open to criticism. Philosophical hermeneutics is the process of critically interpreting the intellectual, cultural and spiritual experiences man undergoes during the acquisition of knowledge. Philosophical hermeneutics is 'an interpretation of interpretation, a prolonged meditation upon what happens to us within hermeneutic experience when we are challenged by texts and artworks, ancient and modern' (Davey 2006, 2). This sort of critical interpretation is philosophical in that it tries to understand objectively cultural phenomena by means of critical reflection. It discerns the cultural and religious preconditions of individual experience in order to understand the

predicament, character, and mode of existence of a people. Philosophical hermeneutics in this regard is not an abstract philosophical venture but a preoccupation with how philosophy of a people's way of life plays out in their cultural experiences. In line with this, N. Davey (2006, 2) observed that 'the philosophical within philosophical hermeneutics remains hermeneutical for it is not concerned with the abstract nature of such objectivities but with how they manifest themselves and are encountered within the particularities of experience and their ramifications.'

Consequently, philosophical hermeneutics demands that a subject acknowledges that self-consciousness is profoundly dependent upon what lies outside it, or upon the otherness of different horizons of cultures and persons (Davey 2006, 9). This implies that the analysis of man in his everydayness remains the first requirement in the question of understanding his place in the scheme of being. In this case the problem of securing the kind of access which can lead to the proper interpretation of man in his cultural life becomes an uphill task. Heidegger himself expressed this puzzle and even went as far as warning against any imposed hermeneutical approach when he wrote that 'we have no right to resort to dogmatic construction and to apply just any idea of being and actuality to this entity [man], no matter how self-evident that idea may be; nor may any of the categories which such an idea prescribes be forced on the *dasein* (man) without proper ontological consideration' (Heidegger 1962, 37).

To understand the nature of philosophical hermeneutical approach to man's place in culture, there is need to expose Martin Heidegger's concept of man as ontico-ontological being. In his phenomenological ontology, Heidegger developed a philosophical hermeneutics of man which centred on an idea he termed *Dasein*, which literally means "being there". His description of *Dasein* as a conscious being fits only man. Heidegger argues that because *Dasein* is ontico-ontologically prior, its own state of being is hidden from it. *Dasein* is ontically closest to itself but ontologically farthest from itself (Heidegger 1962, 37). Heidegger means by this that man, as a specie of being among the ranks of beings, is conscious of his closeness to himself but far removed from the awareness of his nature or essential characteristics (Heidegger 1962, 37).

The *Dasein* is a being in the world in the sense that it deals with entities encountered in the world with concern and familiarity (Heidegger 1962, 138). It is lost in the world. With its lostness among other entities in the world, his facts of potentiality for being have already been decided upon him (Heidegger 1962, 312). That is, the tasks, rules, and standards, the urgency and extent, of concern and solicitous Being-in-the-world has already been decided upon him (by his culture). Culture and religion make existential decisions for man and even hides the definite ways in which these decisions have been made. It remains indefinite how or by whom the choices have been made for him. The *Dasein* make no choices of its own. It simply gets carried along by the world, and thus ensnared in inauthenticity. This process can be reversed only if man specifically brings himself back to himself from his lostness in culture and religion (Cf. Heidegger 1962, 312). This process can be reversed only if man specifically brings himself back to himself from its lostness in culture; and this bringing-back implies that man must possess that kind of being by the neglect of which he has lost himself in inauthenticity. When man thus extricates himself back from the culture, his cultural self is modified to reflect his true being so that it becomes authentic. That is, 'Being-one's-Self' (Cf. Heidegger 1962, 313). Heidegger argues that this must be realised by making up for not choosing by choosing to make this choice and deciding his 'potentiality-for-Being' (Cf. Heidegger 1962, 313).

Heidegger thus indicates that man has a mode of being which relates it to the world, therefore implying that there is a relationship between culture and being. Man is a cultural being because from birth he is thrown into a culture without his consent. He is forced into the mode of life imposed on him by the culture. Thus he even without personal decisions becomes a product of the culture into which he is born. Thus man is the primary object of culture. It in this light that Ukwamedua defends that man is a product of education and nature but fundamentally a product of culture; culture is the opened, read and understood pages of book of life. And that man remains at the center of the activities of culture in dialogue with philosophy. (Ukwamedua 2012, 198). Heidegger's phenomenological concept of man as a being in the world, therefore, enabled a critical hermeneutical enquiry into something that had been largely taken for granted in philosophy, the primordial understanding of being in the world.

But in doing this, Hans-Georg Gadamer, recommends dialogue in philosophical monitoring of culture. According to Hans-Georg Gadamer, philosophical monitoring of culture has a dialogical character. Philosophical hermeneutics gets into dialogue with the culture in order to understand its viewpoint. Philosophical hermeneutics begins when the interpreting philosopher opens himself to the context by listening to the culture, that is, to the otherness of the culture, and allowing it to assert its challenging viewpoint. In this way, philosophical interpretation purges itself of its own prejudices and be able to act as a midwife on the culture to deliver its potentialities for development. Gadamer asserts that this hermeneutical phenomenon is at work in every culture, for it is with contact with other cultures – Greece with Persia or Latin Europe with Islam – that a people becomes aware of the limits and questionableness of its deepest assumptions. And this awareness brings with it an openness to new possibilities that is the precondition of genuine understanding (Gadamer 1976, xxi)

IV. Interface between Philosophy and Culture

Having demonstrated that man as a byproduct of culture is condemned to inauthenticity, and needs to extricate himself from his lostness in culture in order to recreate culture that we create noble man, it is necessary to demonstrate how philosophy assumes a hermeneutical stance in its interface with culture. Contact between philosophy and Christian tradition, for instance, shows how philosophy can enable a culture. In scholastic era, philosophy was instrumental in the ennoblement of Christian culture. Philosophy informed Christian theology. The relationship between philosophy and Christian culture became an interaction that sanitized cultural practices in Europe with a view to making culture more human and capable of creating an authentic man.

Many cultural practices have foundations on debased ideologies which philosophy needs to extricate himself from, for instance, use of masquerades for criminal purposes and exploitation of religio-cultural institutions for political and economic ends. Nomadic pastoral life has to be replaced by a more sedentary and civilized life in a community to end incessant clashes between herdsmen and farmers. Philosophy through history has always been interested in expounding the best hermeneutical approach to such practices.

Man's efforts to apply philosophical hermeneutics in recreating culture is evidence in enculturation. The term enculturation captures most the notion of hermeneutical perspective on cultural sanitization. Adaptation was commonly used in the last century up to the Second Vatican council in the 1960s. It was abandoned because it does not portray the idea of enculturation. Enculturation means to make an ideology

assume flesh in another culture. If applied to making a religious ideology relevant to a cultures, it would bring in the notion of evangelization in the Christian context(Pazhayampalli 2004, 1160). Its Islamic equivalent is islamization. Here culture is seen as something in need of ennoblement through religious activities. We shall adapt the paradigm of Christian moment of marriage with culture in this discussion, especially because Christian culture has the singer privilege of contacts with philosophy in the middle ages; so Christianity now claim a pride of place in the business of sanitizing other cultures.

Christianity hermeneutical approach to cultural sanitization tries to make the Christian culture incarnate in particular context of culture such that it finds expression in elements proper to the culture and translates into principles that estimate, direct, and unify the culture, modifying, transforming, chiseling and monitoring it so that it can become a new creation capable of creating a new man(Pazhayampalli 2004, 1161).The Christian moments of contact with other cultures finds expression in the spirit of the Vatican Council II. The fathers of the Vatican II Council recommended that the young churches rooted in Christ take over all the riches of the nation which has been given to Christ as inheritance. Young churches should borrow from the customs, traditions, wisdoms, teachings, arts and sciences of which can... add to the right ordering of life (Ad Gentes, No. 22). Consequently, Pope St. John Paul II, in his address to world of culture, science and art, stated that historical experience shows that Christian culture has never stifled authentic cultural values of any nation. On the contrary, it has integrated and exalted the cultural values proper to the genius of the countries where it has been proclaimed. Furthermore, it has contributed to openness in human relationship, and broken barriers caused by enmity, creating in its stead, an inclusive or a common spiritual and cultural heritage conducive for stable and constructive relationship of peace among all peoples (Pazhayampalli 2004, 1161). In his *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Pope Paul VI (1975, No 61) teaches that the individual churches which are involved with men, their riches and poverty (understood as cultural riches and cultural poverty), their ... general outlook must make the substance of the Christian message their own. They must transpose this message into idioms which can be understood by the people they serve without mutilating the essential truth of the message. He further cautioned that evangelization would lose its power and efficacy if it does not take into consideration its target, making use of their language, signs and symbols and answering the questions implicit in their experiences, thus, reaching out to influence their life (Pope St. Paul VI 1975, No 63).This is a model of an interface between religion and culture at the crossroad between philosophical hermeneutics and the marriage of religion to culture. This is also a model of the interface between religion and culture at the crossroad between philosophical hermeneutics and development.

This interface is positive or negative: positive in the sense that some poor cultural practices are rendered rich, and negative if it destroys potential drivers of development. If interpretation of cultural ideologies is not guided by philosophy, interpretation can constitute a cog in the wheel of development. It can lead to fractured relationships, insurgency and other fanatical cultural attitudes as senseless killing in the name of God, use of culture as a means to economical and political ends. These cultural factors mitigate sustainable development. This is why philosophy hermeneutics on culture should focus on interpreting cultural values as data for social engineering with the aim of erecting a civic society where developmental goals are realizable.

V. Culture and Sustainable Development

If culture is properly sanitized and directed through the methods of philosophical hermeneutics, culture can greatly drive sustainable development because culture contributes to economic advancements and poverty alleviation. This is seen in the immense cultural heritage, cultural creative industries cultural tourism. Culture can be strategic tools for sustainable development if properly interpreted and harnessed especially in developing countries. In a documentary by UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda, cultural and creative industry represent the fastest growing sector in the global economy with a growth rate of 17.6% in Middle East, 30% in Africa, 11.9% in South America, 9.7% in Asia, 6.9% in Oceania and 4.3% in North and Central America (UNESCO 2012, 4). Furthermore, cultural tourism has also become an economic sector with 7% growth from 1998 to 2008, with 12% for the most developing countries for the same period. Cultural tourism which constitutes tangible and intangible cultural assets accounts for 40% world's tourism revenues (UNESCO 2012, 4). Culture driven development also includes non monetized benefits such as greater social inclusiveness, resilience, innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship for individuals and communities (UNESCO 2012, 4). It also leads to the development of local resources and knowledge. UNESCO argues that 'cultural factors influence lifestyle, individual behaviour, consumption patterns, values related to environmental stewardship and our interaction with the natural environment. 'Indigenous knowledge systems practices provide insights and tools for tracking ecological changes preventing biodiversity loss, reducing land degradation and mitigating the effects of climate change (UNESCO 2012, 4). Cultural practices lead to development of the individual provide new job opportunities new market and contribute to general culture based economic growth. In Europe, employment in the culture and crafts sector is estimated to account for 2% of overall employment in the European Union. Important works of art, influential creative thinking, the best schools and universities, and the flourishing of cultural trends have been associated with cities, especially with their power of economic strength (Borg 2005, 19).

Cultural factors account for greater reasons for women's marginalisation in politics. They find it difficult to get into political positions because of cultural ideologies, patterns and predetermined economic and social roles (Orji, et. al 2018, 20). Sometimes these cultural factors limit their literacy level and political integration. African culture, for instance, is notorious for violation of women's contributive right. It is in view of this that women's rights activists all over the world clamour for equality with men. These kinds of situations are cogs in the wheel of development.

Consequently, the task of philosophical hermeneutics on culture, given this specific function of cultural developmental drive, is to interpret cultural practices and help culture deliver what it has in its womb for sustainable development. Philosophy has the function of interpreting culture and advancing ways of integrating cultural riches into governance, expansion of cultural tourism, development of indigenous economic theories, environmental sustainability, fostering peaceful coexistence and social inclusiveness, technological advancements, encouragement of entrepreneurship activities and sportsmanship.

VI. Conclusion

This paper has been able to demonstrate the interface between philosophical hermeneutics and culture with a view to assessing whether philosophical hermeneutics on culture and religion can lead to

sustainable development. This paper has been able to demonstrate that culture is the way of life of a people. Culture includes all values, customs, language, music, art, food, dress, dwellings, and dances of a people. Culture is a way of being human, of expression and of developing relationships with creation, with one another and with God. And that culture is a creature of man, and that culture in turn creates man; and if culture is to create a noble individual, culture itself needs to be ennobled by allowing philosophy to heal its imperfections such that it can in turn create a perfect human person in terms of mentality attitude and disposition. Man is just thrown into culture without his consent leaving him in inauthenticity because his life has already been decided for him. His culture has to be reinterpreted in order to purge it of all its debased practices so that an authentic man can be created. If he is to make reasonable progress in sustainable development, he has to assert himself by authenticating himself. Only then can there exist a disinterested relationship between culture and politics or between religious ideologies and economic policies. If culture is properly recreated and properly directed through the methods of philosophical hermeneutics, culture can greatly drive sustainable development. Then we will realize that culture can be powerful driver for sustainable development, especially in its contribution to the economy and poverty alleviation, as seen in the immense cultural heritage, cultural creative industries, and cultural tourism.

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