

CONVERSATIONS:

Conversational thinking is articulated as the new approach to philosophical inquiry. It has two strands: conversational philosophy and interrogatory theory with conversationalism and interrogationism as their respective methodic ambience. The former is a method of philosophic thought that involves critical and creative engagement of a philosopher with other actors geared toward increasing literature, developing concepts and building systems, the latter is the methodic ambience of interrogatory theory and is a method of social thought that involves deconstructive and reconstructive engagement of a philosopher with social structures and social agents geared toward building strong social institutions and correcting faulty ones. This journal adopts and promotes this approach to philosophizing for African philosophy. Readers are encouraged to submit their conversational piece (maximum of 2000 words) on any essay previously published in this journal or on any controversial topics, thoughts or authors for publication. The aim is to enhance the evolution of new epistemes in African philosophy. The subject column for the email submissions should read “Manuscript for Conversations”. Enjoy the two conversations in this issue.

Conceptualization:

To converse or hold a conversation literally means to have an informal exchange of ideas or information. Here, we employ the term in a slightly more technical sense. Philosophical conversation for us is not a mere informal exchange of ideas or a simple informal dialogue between two interlocutors; it is rather a strictly formal intellectual exercise propelled by philosophical reasoning in which critical and rigorous questioning creatively unveils new concepts from old ones. This process involves a ‘creative struggle’ which is the African philosopher’s struggle against the postcolonial imaginary to create systems, new concepts and open up new vistas of thought. Contrast this with ‘destructive struggle’, a fixation on the precolonial originary which destroys any chances of creating something new. Not all philosophic engagements qualify as conversational thinking; for the latter, there are canons and themes that must guide the discourse. Conversational thinking thus is more than a dialogue; it is a rule-guided encounter between proponents (Nwa-nsa) and opponents (Nwa-nju), engaged in protestations and contestations of thoughts in place and in space. A conversational school therefore would be any circle of like-minded philosophers who adopts this approach in their practice of philosophy. For us, in The Conversational School of Philosophy – The Calabar Circle, this should now define not only the new era of African philosophy but the practice of philosophy generally in our Age. We encourage colleagues in other universities to establish their own circles.

POSTMODERNISM AND OBJECTIVITY IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES: REDRESSING NWEKE’S UNDERSTANDING OF ATABOR

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The opening topic whose thesis needs clarification is, “The Question of Objectivity, its Implications for the Social Sciences in the Era of Postmodernism: Africa in Perspective”, published in the Special Issue of this journal on Postmodernism and African Philosophy (Volume 3, Number 2, July-December 2014, pp.50-61). The sequence of the argument in this paper which was meant to create a liberating ground from the suspicious position of the African mind in relation to globalization takes the following pattern: can the social sciences be regarded as science? Must the social science be reduced to the methods in the natural sciences before it can be called science? Does the social science retain any capacity for objective truth? To the above questions, what could be gleaned from the paper is that, the social sciences can justifiably be regarded as science, the social science must not necessarily meet the requirements of the methods of the natural sciences to be called science and that the social science has a right claim to objectivity.

From the above conclusion, the paper enters the next level of its inquiry. If there is objectivity in the social sciences, to what extent is the postmodernist comfortable with the claims of objectivity in the social sciences? Postmodernism as an ideology challenges any form of absolutism of metanarratives and would be better at home with a deconstructed and restructured framework. Hence, truth, within the framework of postmodernism nurtures affinity with nationalism, relativism, pluralism and subjectivism. This, automatically cuts short the possibility of any univocal vision. It is this standpoint of postmodernism that was contested and rebutted so as to allow for the possibility of objectivity as worked out by the social sciences so that the life of man can be better regardless of geographical location.

I shall now attempt to respond and clarify some of the critical queries and issues of Victor Nweke’s conversation titled, “Postmodernism and the Objectivity of the Social Sciences: An Interrogative Conversation with Augustine Atabor”. Nweke’s first query is: “... is the rejection of the possibility of objective truth by postmodernism an attack on the social sciences?” Or to use his words more directly, “is postmodernism a vituperator or a vindicator of the social sciences?” (2015, 79). the question on the objectivity of the social sciences is not a recent debate. However, as a science, the social sciences have standards which all its research must conform to, and once this standards are met, then, the objective character of the findings is inferred. From Atabor’s paper, this submission comes out even clearer when he said:

Though, one cannot claim ignorance of the politicization of globalization, however, the need for the world to have a global ideology that would provide for

and project justice and respect for persons and communities as well as provide a basis for the minimizing and resolving of conflicts locally and internationally has become increasingly clear. While it is believed that the social sciences will provide the framework and grounds to achieve this objective, the postmodernists' attack on the plausibility of the claims of objectivity by the social sciences, remains a big challenge. (2014, 57)

If truth is relative and objectivity is an illusion, then we can be sure that there is no foundation for morality and metaphysics. However, it must be known that the project of trying to overthrow metaphysics and morals has always been doomed to failure. Hence, postmodernism could be said to liberate the social sciences if it is only saying that objectivity must not be defined by the scientific spirit of the natural science. But, it vituperates the social sciences if it says that objectivity does not exist at all in the social sciences. As Atabor puts it:

If the social sciences were only to be objective when the methods of the natural sciences are imported into its modes of inquiry, then the attack of postmodernism on positivism is an attack aimed at the possible claims of objectivity by the social science.(2014,55)

However we know it to be true that objectivity in the social science is not dependent on the truths of the natural sciences.

The second submission of Nweke follows from the above. Nweke argues that to say that, "the attack of postmodernism on positivism is an attack aimed at the possible claims of objectivity by the social sciences is inaccurate." (2015, 80). Unfortunately, this cannot be traced to Atabor's original thesis. Therefore it is found wanting on the grounds of misunderstanding and a more careful rereading of Atabor's text is recommended. The social sciences do not necessarily subscribe to the positivists school of thought, hence their claims of objectivity is not dependent on the tenets of positivism, and therefore, an argument that dethrones positivism does not immediately affect the social sciences.

Moving ahead Nweke then drops his third nugget:

Modernism encourages the universalization of Western values while postmodernism encourages the relativization of all values, extols cross-cultural borrowing and challenges intellectuals in all cultures, including Africa, to seek and devise solutions to the diverse problems affecting human beings in the contemporary world using any fruitful method. (2015, 80-81)

91 This for me is too narrow a tale to be told both of modernism and postmodernism, however if I am to use Nweke's definition and understanding of modernism and postmodernism, then I will say that it appears that he seems to favour postmodernism against modernism, but it is fairer to say that both modernism and postmodernism do not hold any future for the African. While modernism excludes the African in its

discourse because it thinks him dispossessed of rationality, postmodernism introduces the African to a divisive philosophy which automatically destroys the communalistic orientation of the African man and robs him of the value of unity, thereby exposing him to the pains of tribalism and ethnicity. This very same postmodern publication of relativism allows the African walls to be more permissive and makes western and eastern infiltrations easier.

Fourth, Nweke submits that:

Postmodernism sees objectivity in the social sciences and indeed in all the sciences as a matter of “compatibility” or “solidarity” with the “consensus” reached by the works of leading authorities in a given intellectual community at a given point in time. (2015, 81)

I must say that truth is not a matter of politics, neither is it a matter of solidarity or consensus. Truth has a unique objective character. If the Westerners have politicized the truth, we will be unfair to ourselves to further the proliferation of the politicization of truth. It must be known that between the oppressed and the oppressor, none is human; while the oppressed is a slave, the oppressor is a beast. Freedom only comes when the oppressed is able to liberate himself and then liberates his oppressor. If objectivity becomes a matter of solidarity and compatibility what does it hold for the future of Africa?

As a last point, Nweke draws a curtain on his queries as he says:

Globalization today is more or less the universalization of Western values because it is riding on the wheels of modernism, and an ideal global ideology will only be possible if it emerges as a product of consensus reached by the views of leading authorities in all regional intellectual and social communities that make up the globe. (2015, 81)

The point above is quite understandable. However, I have heard in some quarters that the United Nations is a tool which the West use to further her dominance. If this is true, then I wonder which platform Nweke will recommend as the bases for the universal dialogue that would yield a global idea that is far reaching.

Generally, the us-and-them mentality has not taken us far in the global race. Africa must rise to the challenges of globalization. The wider the impact a country has in terms of the value she adds to better human life, the more money will she control. Africa has everything it needs to compete favorably in the global race. Africa must realize her unique place in world politics and economy. What are those goods that the world needs that can only be gotten from Africa? Why cannot Africans develop their market around such goods? Let it be known; he who adds and create the greater value will certainly have more money, and consequently possess more control power.

Relevant Literature

1. ATABOR, Augustine A. "The Question of Objectivity, its Implications for the Social Sciences in the Era of Postmodernism: Africa in Perspective", [Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions, Special Issue], Postmodernism and African Philosophy], pp50-61, Vol 3., No 2., July-December 2014. Paperback.
2. NWEKE, Victor C. A. "Postmodernism and the Objectivity of the Social Sciences: An Interrogative Conversation with Augustine Atabor" [Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions], pp79-81, Vol.4., No 1., 2015. Web.

