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Full Length Research Paper

Interplay between philosophy and history: Additional justification for course enrollments across disciplines

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This paper seeks to revisit the bonds between history and philosophy and to unravel not just the enormously fertile ground lying fallow for so long between them, but also the inevitability of one to the other. In the main body of the study, it was discovered that any serious claim to explore what the term 'history' stands for must strive, first of all, to surmount some inherent epistemological, semantical, syntactical, interpretative, metaphysical and valuation (that is philosophical) problems. On the other hand, from the definitions of philosophy we are quick to realize that since historical events are contingent, they necessarily provide the veritable raw materials on which universalizable philosophical truths can be built. The study went on to show, for example, how the cyclic, progressionist, perfectibility and other theories of history are conveniently explicated in philosophical terms. The last portion of the paper dwelt on the contribution of history to philosophy from the viewpoints of the contributions of Russell, Darwin, Chardin, Huxley and Kuhn.

Key words: History, philosophy, temporality, interpretation, empathic understanding, values, cyclic theory, progressionist theory, moral progress, perfectibility, Darwinism.

INTRODUCTION

In most departments in Nigerian universities offering degree programmes in philosophy, philosophy of history is either not offered on a regular basis or is thinly subscribed when it is offered. Students are more apt to enroll for such courses as philosophy of law, philosophy of the social sciences and philosophy of science. This apparent lack of interest in philosophy of history may not be altogether difficult to understand. In the past two decades or so extremely few Nigerian students offer history as a course at the secondary school level. As a result, departments of history in Nigerian universities have been largely unable to get enough candidates to enroll for history courses. It is not surprising then that in order to ensure that they are not put out of job, most Nigerian departments of history have resorted to adding International Studies and Diplomacy programmes as part of their degree offerings. This addition seems to have paid off nicely as many of such departments are now enjoying a boom in students' enrolment as a result of the new programme. Notably, disinterest in the study of history was expectedly accompanied by decline in the enthusiasm for philosophy of history. The logic is simple: if the study of history was no longer fashionable, philosophy of history should attract far less attention. Yet, there are good reasons for not only why our students and indeed all of us should be encouraged to study history and the philosophy of history but, more importantly, why those who major in these two subject areas should take more in-depth courses across the two disciplines.

CURSORY JUSTIFICATION FOR THE STUDY OF HISTORY AND OF PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

A deep reflection ought to reveal to us that historical disposition fills a very important gap in the lives of individuals and nations alike. People who have been brought up by foster parents or adopted parents have been known to have spent vast energy and resources in search of the homes of their forebears. Nations have sought to deify their past heroes who might have saved

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their race from a ferocious war in times past. A child, whose parents died while he/she was about a year old, always strives in adulthood to learn more about those parents. The fact is that man is *temporality* in the words of Heidegger (Blackham, 1983). This means that man is necessarily a temporal self-stretching being within the future, the past and the present. For man and so also for a community and a nation, this movement to and fro within the future, past and present is a crucial element of every existence. Besides such ontological issues, is it not true that developing nations would be in greater need to understand the trends and logics of world civilization more than fully developed nations? Most of today's advanced nations had built their progress from the point of view of a deep understanding of the direction and movement of world history. And it would not totally be out of place to state that much of our rudderless floundering today would in part be as a result of our inability to locate ourselves properly and significantly within the direction of current world history. Was it not the great Cicero who said: "Not to know what took place before you were born is to remain forever a child" (Marwick, 1983). Given the above rendering, what exactly is the aim of this study?

AIM OF THIS STUDY

The aim of this investigation is to draw attention to the common ground between history and philosophy and thus show that history and philosophy of history are so intimately interwoven that those who major in history, if they are to get a deeper insight of their discipline, would benefit immensely were they to take more courses in philosophy and philosophy of history. While philosophy majors would certainly understand human society better if urged to take more courses in history. More specifically, courses in philosophy of history stand to benefit tremendously from an in-depth study of history. This appreciation of the intimacy between history and philosophy of history is however rarely found among our university students here in Nigeria (and perhaps in most of Africa) and one of the purposes of this study is to remind philosophers and historians alike not only of the bonds that tie them together but also of the rich fertile ground which has been lying fallow beneath and between them for too long and which needs to be explored urgently.

We shall commence this discussion by exploring definitional issues that bind philosophy and history together.

DEFINITIONAL ISSUES

Definitions of history

There seems to be as many definitions of the term *history* as there are historians. We shall however take just a few. The noted Italian historian Benedetto Croce (Carr, 1969) defined history as the re-creation of past experience in the mind of the historian; for Robin Collingwood the peculiar object of history was to relive in the historian's mind the thoughts of historical agents; Nietzsche saw history as a dialogue between the past and the present in which the present takes and keeps the initiative. If we now turn our attention to more detailed definitions of history, we note that the Chamber's Encyclopaedia (Vol.III, 1970) defines history thus: history is the reconstruction by and for those who are living the life of those who are dead. It is born therefore of the present interest which thinking, feeling, acting man finds exploring the past. As for the Encyclopedia Americana (Vol. 14, 1989), history is the past experience of mankind. More exactly, history is the meaning of that past experience as it has been preserved, largely in written records. In the usual sense, history is the product of historians' work in restructuring the flow of events from the original written traces or 'sources' into narrative account.

The subject matter of history is the significant past, meaning the institutional and individual actions that affect the experience and development of whole communities.

From the above definitions three important items can be isolated as integral aspects of history namely, the past, reconstruction of the past and written narrative.

If we move one step further and integrate the last two items, we are left with two important aspects namely, the past and reconstruction of the past in the present by the historian as deposed in his narrative.

At this point, it should be quite clear that a number of problems surface.

Problems arising from the above definitions

First and foremost, the fundamental problem that emerges from the definitions given in the preceding section is epistemological. How would a person living in the present acquire some knowledge of some happenings in the past, perhaps in a past in which he had not existed? In other words, given the past–history distinction, how does the historian fit these things together? Obviously then, how is the link between the past and history made? How the historian attempts to know the past is central to the way we determine the possibilities of what history is or can be. After all, it is the historian's claim to knowledge (rather than belief) that makes it the discourse it is. From what has been said so far then, history is part of another discourse philosophy, taking part in the general question of what is knowledgeably possible with reference to its own province of knowledge-the past. A number of epis-temological problems then arise with respect to the past-history distinction. Firstly, there can never be total history since no historian can cover or recover the totality of past

events as their content is virtually limitless – one cannot recount more than a fraction of what has occurred.

Secondly, it is not possible to recount any aspect of the past as it really was since; after all, the past was not an account, but events, situations and so on. Besides, since the past is already gone, our account of it cannot be checked against it: no fundamental 'text' is correct, all we have are variations. It is not surprising then that Steven Giles (Giles S, 1989) claims that what has occurred before is already apprehended through the sedimentary layers of previous interpretations and through the reading habits and categories developed by previous/current interpretive discourses.

Thirdly, no matter how much we are able to verify history, it remains essentially a personal construct, a manifestation of the historian's perspective. Of course, the historian's logical freedom to write anything is constrained by the fact that the reader has access to the historian's sources. And our own personal constructs determine what we make of them even as the writer's viewpoint and predilections shape the choice of historical materials. At the end then, the same events/sources do not entail one and only one reading.

Fourthly, through insight we know in a way more about the past than people who lived in it. By using knowledge, which perhaps is previously unavailable, the historian discovers what has been forgotten about the past and pieces together things never pieced together before. People and social interactions get caught up in processes that can only be appreciated in retrospect; documents and other traces are transformed into patterns which might not have been conceived earlier by the original authors. Thus history conflates; it changes and exaggerates aspects of the past.

But against the background of all the issues raised above, one nagging issue remains: how possible is it to get an informed appreciation of the predicaments and viewpoints of people in the past in order to gain real historical understanding? Can empathic understanding come to our rescue at this point? Wittgenstein (James, 1992) had discussed the problem of 'other minds' – whether it is possible to enter into the mind of another person we know well and who is beside one and concludes that it is not. One then wonders how we can enter lots and lots of minds, even minds we cannot possibly know well, and which are far away from us in space and time. Besides the difficulty alluded to above, in every act of communication there is an act of translation going on. Every speech- act is an 'interpretation between privacies', and when this act of translation is not between you and someone else here and now but between 'us and them' somewhere else and at some other time, then the entire task is problematic. For all past events, historians have to bring their mind set programmed in the present. The problem that inheres in the task to empathize the past is highlighted thus by Steiner (1975):

> Croce's dictum, 'all history is contemporary history', points directly to the ontological paradox of the past tense. Historians are increasingly aware that the conventions of narrative and of implicit reality with which they work are philosophically vulnerable. The dilemma exists on at least two levels. The first is semantic because the bulk of the historian's material consists of utterances made in and about the past. Given the perpetual process of linguistic change not only in vocabulary and syntax but in meaning, how is he to interpret and translate his sources… Reading a historical document, collating the modes of narrative in previous written history, interpreting speech-acts performed in the distant or nearer past, he finds himself becoming more and more of the translator in the technical sense… And the meaning thus arrived at must be the 'true one'. By what metamorphic magic is the historian to proceed?

So much then for epistemological issues, what about metaphysical ones? Here we shall confine ourselves to Heidegger's predilections (Murray, 1970). Heidegger coined the word *Dasein* as his name for the being of man. Through and only through an elucidation of temporality, in his view, can the being of *Dasein* be grasped wholly in a unified and structured manner. Temporal existence displays itself as a tri- unitary dynamic of past, present and future. The future is the primary constitutive movement which as being-toward-the-end, man takes up his having been (past) and makes decisions (in the present) on the basis of projected possibilities. Man, in his view, is best understood as a movement from the future, to the past and then to the present. This movement is not just something which man participates in; *it is what constitutes man*. So *Dasein* is itself historizing; it is primarily and essentially historical not just belonging to the historical world. Traditionally and ordinarily, the historical is associated primarily with the past *(vergangenheit)* as something 'over and done with', something interesting and relevant. Heidegger wants to replace the usual concept of the past with that of 'having-been' *(Gewesenhert)*: I am always 'having-been' (past) and in definite possibilities (future). *Dasein* does not become historical because it is past, but rather because it exists in the tri-dimensionality of temporality, it is historical. According to Heidegger, history has its essential importance not in 'the past', in its 'today' or its 'connection with the past', but rather in *Dasein's* future. *Dasein* lives in projected possibilities, and only in this region of projected possibilities can it be its present and past. Historicity has its existential condition of possibility in the *temporalizing of temporality*. For Heidegger then, history is metaphysics. History in this new sense is not an ontic region of reality to be investigated, not the science

of such a region, or does it denote the structures of human existence. History is the region of all regions and presents itself as the event of every epoch in which the truth of Being is revealed and/or concealed. For Heidegger, metaphysics is the way in which Being occurs, being as history.

At this stage we can now examine more intimately how the definitions of history relate to the definitions of philosophy.

HISTORY AND DEFINITIONS OF PHILOSOPHY

The question "what is philosophy?" imposes some problems instantly. To start with, contrary to the way it may appear to a layperson, asking such a question itself inaugurates the philosophical spirit. But what is even more curious is that one way of answering that question lies within the purview of *History of Philosophy*. From the history of philosophy we would learn what some philosophers take philosophy to be. In so doing we would certainly be concerned with history and if we prolonged our search further, there would emerge the need to find out concisely the meaning of history.

A second way in which the question "what is philosophy?" can be answered would be to enlist how the concept has been used. Again, to talk of *been used* is going back to the past and thus we are returned to the domain of history. A third way of defining philosophy would be to demand how the term ought to be employed. This entails reference to the historic future, futuristic understanding and action. Next, as a way of demonstrating further the circular interphase between philosophy and history, we may need to remind ourselves that the word 'history' goes back to the Greek verb *eidenai* meaning "to know". Most commonly, the term *historia* signified *inquiry* and in antiquity this covered the physical investigation of the Ionian philosophers (Thales, Anaximender, Heraclitus, Xenophanes and others) as well as the work of Herodotus (father of History). Besides these interphases with respect to terminology, what about the content of philosophy? One way of defining philosophy (at least from the point of view of antiquity) is by considering the Greek origin of the term *Philo Sophia* meaning "love of wisdom". Wisdom comprised all knowledge (including history) and prudence. Prudence provided people with the principles on which to live now and project into future action - all these are based on a deep understanding and interpretation of their past actions or that of their peers and neighbors. Accordingly, there can be no prudence if there was no history, and philosophy would be all the worse for it. Now, even if we go one step further and claim that philosophy aims at providing ultimate answers to ultimate questions about, among others, the human predicament and the human destiny, it should be clear that not much will be achieved in that search if man's historicity is not taken into full account. Evidence of this abounds in existentialism, phenomenology and pragmatism which are central philosophical schools of thought of our time.

Finally, even if one subscribe to the definition of philosophy as a search for veritable, immutable and eternal truths, a view which led Aristotle (Carr, 1961) to declare that poetry was 'more philosophical' and 'more serious' than history, since poetry was concerned with general truth and history in particular, it should be evident that apart from the necessary eternal truths of mathematics, all other so-called eternal truths are often gleaned off contingent and unique events of the world. What this means is that history provides the raw material from which certain forms of universalized truths are extracted. After all, Aristotle himself was of the view that the universal lies (or is extractable) from the particular.

In the foregoing section, we have labored to demonstrate that whether from the point of view of the definitions of *history* or of the definitions of *philosophy*, history and philosophy are to a large extent inter-dependent.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF PHILOSOPHY TO THEORIES IN HISTORY

In this discussion we shall dwell on some details on the cyclic theory of history, history as progress and perfectibility as a theory of history. Brief mention will be made of the Hegelian and Marxian theories of history as these are already well known by most people as philosophically brewed and nourished.

Cyclic theory of history

The cyclic theory of history holds that events in history have a beginning, then move on to a peak, suffer a decline and then plunge onto a demise. From the debris which accompanies such demise, something similar to the earlier beginning sprouts, undergoes the same sort of development and declines, ending up once again in demise.

Examples of these abound in the rise and fall of ancient civilizations such as those of Egypt, Greece and Rome. These are examples of civilizations which at one time or the other (at the height of their dominance) ruled the world only to succumb later to decline and decay. Thus rendered, some theorists perceive no genuine progress in history, only instead cyclical recurrence. The origin of this theory of history is usually ascribed to the ancients even though Oswald Spengler in his book "The Decline of the West" goes to some detail to expound on this theory. Also Arnold Toynbee in his own book 'A Study of History' somewhat endorses this theory of history. Our concern here, however, is to show that both in antiquity and in the more modern times, this theory is firmly rooted in philosophy. Without bothering ourselves with the possible

astronomical antecedents to the Ionian Philosopher Empedocles, let us consider his cosmology. He enunciated that there were four basic elements: earth, air, fire and water. Each of these elements was everlasting and was combined in varying proportions thus constituting the changing complex substances in our universe. He also postulated two basic principles namely Love and Strife. These basic principles are to be held accountable for the various combinations of the four elements enumerated earlier. At times, Love dominated and thus gave rise to a unitary 'sphere', more or less, then Strife would begin to infiltrate. When eventually Strife holds sway, decline, disintegration and decay would result. The golden period was when Love was in the ascendancy while the period of decline was due to the dominance of Strife. In the view of Empedocles, the changes in the world were not governed by any purpose. They were governed by Chance and Necessity. The material world was to him a sphere such that during the Golden period Strife was outside and correspondingly during the period of demise and decay, Love was outside. Strife was held accountable for quarrels, enmity and so on while Love accounted for unity, togetherness, achievement and the likes. Besides Empedocles, many other notable personages in antiquity subscribed to the cyclic recurrence of events. Cleanthes (a 3rd century BC Stoic) proposed and described the notion of *ekpyrosis* as a process of growth and death. In his treatise *On the Nature of the Gods (Book II p. 46)*, the great Cicero (Wiener PP.1963) had this to say:

> There will ultimately occur a conflagration of the whole world, because when the moisture has been used up and the earth can no longer be nourished nor the air continue to flow, nothing will remain but fire, by which, as a living being and a god, once again, a new world may be restored as before". Other thinkers, who subscribed to the idea of *ekpyrosis* included Seneca, Diagenes and Plutarch.

Much later, the dialogues of Plato were to become rich and much valued source of cyclical thinking. In the *Timacus* and the *Critias,* Plato adumbrates periodic geological cataclysms which consigned civilization to a cyclic process. Even in the third book of the *Laws,* Plato presumes a historical past in which thousands upon thousands of political cycles, with states coming into being and perishing at intervals, exhibits the same constitutions over and over again, from good to bad and from bad to good. Plato's pupil, Aristotle was also not to be left out in this cyclical vision of civilization and much of his work was to form the anchor on which the cyclical principle was passed on from antiquity to much later periods.

Much recently, the notion of eternal recurrence was revived by Friedrich Nietzsche in the 19th century with arguments different from those of the Stoics. He argued that since there was no end to time and presumably only a finite number of possible events and things, everything existing now must recur.

Thus in *Zarathustra*, we find the Superman saying:

> "The plexus of causes returneth in which I am intertwined - it will again create me! I myself pertain to the cause of the eternal return. I will come again with the sun, with the earth, with this eagle, with this serpent, - not to a new life, or a better life, or a similar life. I will come again eternally to this identical and selfsame life, in its greatest and its smallest…" (Wiener, 1973).

In the notes of 'The Eternal Recurrence', he surmises that universal energy is finite. Accordingly, since all events are the result of changes based on the expenditure of energy, the number of kinds of things is finite. Since the duration of time is infinite, it has already lasted for an infinite series of moments, all possibilities must have been already realized and the future will inevitably repeat the past. From what has been said so far, is it not clear that even if there had been some quasi-empirical basis for the cyclic theory of history, additional theoretical support was provided by ancient and more modern cosmology? But can we say the same thing of the theory of "History as Progress?"

Progressionist theory of history

A. O. Lovejoy (Wiener, 1973) and George Boas in their book *Primitivism and Related Matters* define progress as a general and necessary law of continuous movement governing man's past, present and also his future development. Progress implies a goal and a direction, and direction in turn implies values. As a consequence of the above definition, the question always arises as to how progress is to be measured in terms of happiness, power over nature, moral advance, technological advancement, advancement in learning or gross national product? Were we to accept any of these postures regarding progress, we would be led to agree with Walter Bagehot (Wiener, 1973) and Edward Carr in their claim that the ancients did not explicitly propose any historical theory based on the concept of progress. But as to the additional claim by Bagehot that the ancients did not have an idea of what the concept progress was, it may be instructive to remind ourselves that Xenophanes (Wiener, 1973), the Ionian poet-philosopher, was reported to have said:

> Not from the beginning did the gods reveal everything to mankind, but in the course of time by research man discovered improvements

What else can the above statement be, but a general

affirmation of progress. So, we are not in a strong position to say that it is altogether accurate that the ancients were oblivious to the notion of progress. What we may not be so certain about is whether they saw the entirety of history as a timeless progressive movement or whether they saw progress as compatible with the then prevalent cyclic theory. We shall not attempt to answer this question but we must note right away that for most writers, the Jews of the Old Testament and the Christians of the New Testament are the forerunners of the theory of history as progress. According to the views of J. Delvaille (Wiener, 1973) in the study of Hebrew beliefs, a distinction ought to be made between the prophetic and the later apocalyptic visions of the future. He was of the view that the prophetic teaching contained no reference to the fall of man or to original sin, hindering the growth of well-being and justice of this earth. He traced in some detail the visions offered by the prophets of an age of social justice and universal peace, when Israel would become the divine instrument of bringing nations to repentance and to the knowledge of the true God. Delvaille also held that in the early period there was in the Christian teaching the earlier seeds of a theory of progress; thus the parables of the kingdom contained passages declaring that the manifestations of God in Christ were to be a seed which was to grow and progress, to produce results beyond their hope and imagination and to act in humanity like leaven in bread till the whole mass was transformed. As a matter of fact, the early dominance of religious thinking as the foundation of the doctrine of history and progress is well attested in the work of St. Augustine of Hippo (1972) and its unfettered influence in the middle ages and beyond. To be candid, St. Augustine's primary concern can easily be gleaned from his own words:

> While they, the impious pagans, might go in a circle, as the Psalmist had written, the sound doctrine of the Christian lay in a straight line

St. Augustine proposes the City of God and the City of the Devil, each having its counterpart in our own world. The men of the City of God, during their sojourn on earth are possessed by the divine spirit of peace as they look beyond this world to everlasting peace in heaven. The members of this world who are mates of the City of the Devil are enslaved by their concupiscence. They cannot see further than their own desires and these lead to turbulent lives in the appeasement of their lust. Indeed Delvialle draws attention to Augustine's reference to the advances made by man in the knowledge of nature, in the arts and skills, in the means of communication, in method of healing, in agriculture and in navigation. Yet, to Augustine, progress of this sort was of little significance. There was only one progress- towards salvation. What happens in the course of history is made intelligible only by the hope of a final triumph of the City of God over the City of Men. But the City of God is an ideal which could not become real in this world.

Now, we shall not go on and on into the Augustinian notion of progress. Our primary concern is to show why the progressionist theories of the religionists should be considered philosophical in the first instance. Michael Murray (1970) provided an answer when he said:

> Taken alone the word 'Philosophy' mentions neither ontology nor theology, but simply signifies the loving pursuit of wisdom. Traditionally, that is, since the Greeks, the highest wisdom is onto-theological in nature because it refers to being as being and to the divine… Philosophy in its very origin is onto-theologically oriented.

Augustine's City of God attempts to locate man as a being within the coordinates of the Divine. Accordingly, his propositions qualify as an Onto-theological system.

Of course the notion of history as progress did not end with the religionists. Commitment to history as progress was to re-emerge after the Renaissance but this time the focus of progress in history shifted from the spiritual to advancement in man's material world; man's estate on earth. The Jewish-Christian theological view of history thus became secularized. Historians like Gibbon, Acton, Dampier and Bury were never tired of pointing out how continuous advancement was possible in many aspects of human life-transmission of acquired skills, advance in liberty, mastery over nature, progressive development of human capabilities and so on.

In this important task of redefining *progress*, philosophy was not a mere onlooker. Philosophers like Charles Bradley and Isaiah Berlin threw their weight in support of the progressivist argument. Rejecting the version of progress preached by the Churchmen, Bradley opined that all events in this world arise (emerge) through a new combination of elements of matter and energy without supernatural guidance. Bradley's metaphysics was to be known as *emergent materialism*. Isaiah Berlin in his inaugural lecture "Two Concepts of Liberty" attacked historical determinism and gave open endorsement to the role of free will and responsibility in human history.

So much for the general notion of progress, another central aspect of progress that deserves special mention is moral progress.

History as moral progress

The cardinal question here is whether human beings and the human race with successive generations acquire increasing sensibilities and sophistication with respect to the way individuals treat one another, that is how society treats individuals, and nations treat other nations(whether friends or foes), or whether the reverse is the case. The

significance of this question is aggravated in the wake of development in science, technology, knowledge and economics. So, put in other terms, the question amounts to whether intellectual or material progress was usually accompanied by moral progress or in the stead with moral regress or moral stagnation. A number of different answers have been advanced. Fontenella, who is generally regarded as having been among the first to formulate a definite theory of the progress of knowledge denied that there was a parallel advancement in the aesthetic arts. He was even more definite in rejecting the notion of moral progress. Man's passion, he thought, would always remain the same; the proportion of 'reasonable' men would always be small. Condorcet mentioned that intellectual progress was the cause of a parallel development in the arts of life, morality and happiness.

Besides conventional historians, philosophers have been unsparing in contributing to this debate. For Kant (Manuel, 1965), the notion of indefinite moral regression was unacceptable since such a trend would lead to the ultimate destruction of mankind. In his view, the very fact that human beings lament on contemporary moral behavior was adequate significance and evidence of the progressive sophistication of moralization of mankind. He ends up with

> a glimmer of hope that there is in many, an inclination toward the good. He considers it a duty, an inborn duty to act as if progress were indeed determined.

Mandelssolin in his book *Jerusalem* refuted the idea that there could be education for the entire race for the better. Mankind remained essentially the same, moral advancement applied essentially only to individuals. For Leibniz, to achieve a more penetrating knowledge of the universe is a way of glorifying the creator. Leibniz advocates a high scientific intellectual order as a way of promoting the conveniences of life, human happiness and therapy demonstrating the goodness of God.

Lessing and Herder, both followers of Leibniz, were later to device the idea of a world-historic progressive plan unfolding gradually in time and as a manifestation of God's goodness. In Comte's view, religion, philosophy, science, the fine arts, the industrial arts, economics and political institutions were taken to be a close mutual dependence and the progress of society from one stage to another was not an aggregate of partial changes, but the product of a single impulse, acting through all the partial agencies.

From the foregoing discussion on moral progress, it became obvious to many that if such a grand design was to be achieved, there was the need to give serious consideration to the possibility of the perfectibility of man.

This is exactly what the theory of history of the perfectibility of man does.

Progress as perfectibility

The central thesis of this position is the claim that scientific and rationalist society would endure for ever without decline; because of the cumulative effect of scientific knowledge, regression was impossible. Progress was irreversible and indefinite: progress in power over nature, in expansive feeling, and in the endless accumulation of knowledge. Progress involved the entirety of man and humanity, moral/religious development, rational/scientific development, societal development. Philosophers at the forefront of this notion of progress include Saint-Simon, Condorcet, Fourier and Comte.

To round up this already long discussion on the contribution of philosophy to the theories of history we will need to mention briefly the celebrated theories of Hegel and Marx. These vastly important theories of history are being mentioned only briefly not only because they are already very well known by most people as being founded on philosophy but because our central aim is to highlight the relevance of philosophy to those theories of history which are either not so well known or of which most people are not aware are founded on philosophy. Let us start with Hegel.

Hegel's Idealistic theory of history

In his *Phenomenology of Spirit,* Hegel (1977) treats the development of consciousness as the key to historical change. Without delving into the details of Hegel's formula, suffice to say that his claim was that from the logical presupposition of any thought whatsoever (*pure being);* he could generate a logical progression that culminated in a concept (the Absolute Idea) which was a synthesis of the entire cycle of development. Karl Marx was later to build his materialistic theory of history on Hegel's dialectics.

Marx's theory of history

While Karl Marx (1970) accepted Hegel's position that a rational process could be discerned within the apparently contingent phases of world history, he rejected the claim that rationality of history was a product of *Spirit* or *Idea* working out its logical implications in the empirical world. Marx's model of history is posited on the claim that the character of a society is determined by its 'economic structure', the methods by which goods are produced. The economic structure ("forces of production" and "relations of production") makes up the "base" or foundation on which the political and legal institutions constituting the *superstructure* are built. The different forces of production (raw materials, tools, labor force employed) give rise to different relations of production

and this in turn determines the character of the legal and political institutions. Marx believed that different forms of society were based ultimately on different modes of production and that resolution of contradictions which surface at the various levels. These levels are between forces of production and relation of production on the one hand and modes of production and the superstructure on the other hand which lead to revolutions and to a march from ancient feudal, capitalist to socialist systems. In the view of Marx then, 'all history was the history of class struggles'. As we have already said earlier, we shall not delve into a rigorous discussion of the Marxian theory of history. Our cardinal interest here is to highlight the fact that his, is a contribution of philosophy to historical theorizing.

If we take what has been said so far as a somewhat adequate exposition of the indispensability of philosophy to history, we shall now move on to explore how history comes to the aid of philosophy.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF HISTORY TO THE CONTENT AND METHODOLOGIES OF PHILOSOPHY

Here, we shall focus on contribution to history of philosophy and to philosophy of science.

Contributions to history of philosophy

The contribution of history to this important arm of philosophy is very straightforward. History of philosophy like the history of all other disciplines explains the growth of knowledge (in this case philosophical knowledge) with the passage of time. Incidentally, since all such studies are historical, they make use of cherished history methodologies, including recourse to primary and secondary sources, to documentary evidences and so on. History of philosophy exposes philosophy's indebtedness to the historical process in a number of ways.

Firstly, history of philosophy makes it clear that philosophy springs from given contexts and indeed as Bertrand Russell (1962) put it: *the circumstances of men's lives do much to determine their philosophy.*

For instance, as Russell further avers, when the Greeks became subject first to the Macedonians, and then to the Romans, the conceptions appropriate to their days of independence were no longer applicable. This produced, on the one hand, a loss of vigor through the breach with tradition, and, on the other hand, a more individual and less social ethic. In consequence, the Stoics depressed by the collapse of the Greek States and the Alexandrian Empire thought of the virtuous life as a relationship of the soul to God, rather than as a relationship of the citizen to the state. The Greek ideas inherited from the age of freedom underwent a gradual process of transformation and those that were specifically religious gained in relative importance; others were discarded because they no longer suited the spirit of the age.

Coming closer to the more modern times, it seems clear that Machiavelle's *Prince* was deeply influenced not just by an exploration of how principalities were won, held and lost in history but by the author's immersion in the public affairs of his time. In similar vein, it is useful to note that Nietzsche's work can be understood, in part, by his admiration for Napoleon. For Nietzche, the importance of the period from 1789 - 1815 was summed up in Napoleon.

Secondly, history draws attention to the fact that part of the philosopher's task in the words of Haddock is to grasp the rationality of the world that has unfolded before him. His understanding of it is always *ex post facto.*

In this wise, it is helpful to consider how the Copernican (Russell, 1962) revolution in astronomy, which postulated that the earth, like all other planets, revolved round the sun, affected philosophical thinking. This theory overthrew the Ptolemaic hypotheses which held sway since antiquity and which had held the view that the earth was the static centre of the cosmos with the sun and all other planets moving round it. The effect of the work of Copernicus was that it assigned to earth and to man a humbler position than they enjoyed under Ptolemy. The earth was not only dethroned from it geometric pre-eminence, it also became difficult to give to man the cosmic importance assigned to him by Christian theology. In consequence, Christian theologians saw Copernicus' theory as contradicting the Bible and indeed when Luther heard about it he said (Russell, 1962):

> People give ear to an upstart astrologer who strove to show that the earth revolves, not the heavens or the firmament, the sun and the moon. This fool wishes to reverse the entire science of astronomy; but sacred scripture tells us that Joshua commanded the sun to stand still, and not the earth.

Calvin (Russell, 1962) similarly asserted "who will venture to place the authority of Copernicus above that of the Holy Spirit". Coming then at a time when philosophy was very intimately intertwined with theology, the Copernican revolution ushered in the rise of science. The emphasis on the greater use of observation was to influence modern philosophy tremendously apart from the fact that it seemed to challenge the age-long philosophical adage "man is the measure of all things". As a matter of fact, during the enlightenment period, Newton was to become the methodological mentor. He was esteemed because he restricted his conclusions to matters that could be demonstrated experimentally; and whatever had been 'made' in the laboratory could (in principle) be applied to the world. Practice became the watchword of the

enlightenment period. Besides, Newton, Bacon (Haddock, 1979) and Locke contributed to this rise of science on the basic premises of empiricism, that knowledge should be founded on experience with inductivism providing validity of a generalization seen in terms of the range of experimental examples which could be cited in its support. Thus, there emerged a theory of knowledge that could happily accommodate curiosity about the past.

Another example of the influence of the past on philosophy can be found in Darwinism (Manuel, 1965). On the basis of Darwin's theory of natural selection and survival of the fittest (founded on actual observation), a new rational and ethical order was to emerge by showing preference for those with superior fitness in adapting to it. Teilhard de Chardin (Manuel, 1965) built his theory on Darwinism and through his own archeological incursions in China he came to the conclusion that at a given moment in time, matter gives birth to consciousness and consciousness now spreads over the peoples of the world of the whole planet. By dint of the sheer physical concentration of growth, physical population must give rise to universal human consciousness and he calls this process *hominisation*. Finally then, to add to Chardin's affirmations, Julian Huxley (Manuel, 1965) had this to say:

> Man represents the culmination of that process of organic evolution which has been proceeding on this planet for over a thousand million years.

The appearance of the human type of mind, which is the latest step in the evolutionary progress, has introduced both new methods and new standards. By means of his conscious reasoning and its chief offspring, science, man has the power of substituting less dilatory, less wasteful and less crude methods of effective progressive change than those of natural selection. But even more relevantly for philosophy, the Darwin-Chardin-Huxley theories have had a number of influences among which are: The emphasis on our relationship with the lower criminals must mean a new moral order between us and them; Spencer's (Manuel, 1965) perception that evolution also includes the progression of societies, the perfectibility of human nature; evolution of higher morality and eventual disappearance of evil and immorality; evolution of Absolute Idea in Hegel's theory of history and the quasi-evolutionary nature of Marx's historical materialism.

Thirdly, history of philosophy, apart from being a body of knowledge in its own right, is particularly useful in the solution of historical riddles concerning philosophy. And in this way, the riddle about the origin of philosophy is considered. For so long, it had been held that philosophy started with Thales. More recently, however, Innocent Onyewuenyi (1994) researched into the history of ancient philosophy and arrived at the illuminating discovery that most of the ancient western philosophy had considerable sojourned in Egypt during which period they underwent pupilage in the Egyptian Mystery Schools. Thales, Pythagoras and others underwent long periods of study in Egypt (Pythagoras was said to have spent 22 years in Egypt). Besides these periods of pupilage, it was discovered that there was great similarity between the teachings of the Mystery Schools and those of the earliest western philosophers. In this way, history pointed the way to the solution of a long-standing problem concerning the origins of philosophy. But apart from history of philosophy, history has been of central importance in areas of philosophy such as inductivism, causation, philosophy of law, philosophy of social sciences, and philosophy of science e.t.c. For want of space, let us limit our discussion to philosophy of science.

Contribution to philosophy of science

A classical illustration of the contribution of history to philosophy of science can be found in Thomas Kuhn's "The Structure of Scientific Revolution" (1962) . Kuhn distinguishes between 'Normal Science' and 'Extraordinary Science'. Normal Science accounts for the day-to-day activity of the scientist during which a particular 'paradigm' dominates over a long period of time (history). The paradigm is trusted implicitly; but it might not fit all experimental findings perfectly. There could always be discrepancies and anomalies. Normal Science then largely consists of resolving these anomalies by making suitable adjustments which leave the paradigm intact. The paradigm is taken as guaranteeing the existence of a solution to every puzzle generated by discrepancies between it and observations. Tests conducted under Normal Science are tests of the experimenter's puzzle-solving skill, not that of the prevailing theory. If the outcome of such a 'test' is negative, it does not compromise the theory in question, it merely hits back on the experiments. It is only with Extraordinary Science that the prevailing theory comes under attack, that genuine testing of theories could occur. At this time, a negative outcome of a test may be regarded, not as a personal failure of the experimenter, but as a failure of the theory.

The important point here for the current study is that Normal Science is in Kuhn's usage, a historical puzzle-solving process which is punctuated once in a while by an instant paradigm-shift (Extraordinary Science or revolution). This means that for Kuhn, an answer to the question "what is Normal Science?" must be sought in what holds dominance over a given historical period, that is, what is Normal Science is historically determined. Kuhn's views have not been allowed to flourish unchallenged. Watkins attacked what he called the Instant-Paradigm component of Kuhn's thesis by directing attention to the Inverse Square Law which is

pre-eminent in many branches of science. He traced its long evolution in time from Aristotle, Copernicus, Kepler to Hooke. Whatever the merit of this attack, its potency so far as our discourse here is concerned is that Watkins' argument provides yet another support to the claim that a paradigm-shift in science could also be a historical process. And so we arrive at the pleasant conclusion that (following after Kuhn) what is called Normal Science can only be identified through a historical process. It is also possible that a paradigm-shift (Extraordinary Science) could be explained only as a historical process (following after Watkins, 1970). This state of affairs enables us to conclude that science (whether 'Normal' or 'Extraordinary') is a historical process.

Given then that we have now pointed out some aspects in which philosophy has been very effective in promoting the study of history and aspects in which history has been extremely useful in furthering the goals of philosophy, let us now capture one additional fundamental common ground between history and philosophy, and between philosophy and values in particular.

HISTORY AND VALUES

Edward Carr takes the position that first, you cannot fully understand or appreciate the work of the historian unless you have first grasped the stand point from which he himself approached it. Secondly, that the stand point is itself rooted in a social and historical background. Elsewhere in the same book, Carr (1961) asserts: ''When you take up a historical work, it is not enough to look for the author's name on the title- page, look also for the date of publication or writing – it is sometimes even more revealing''. Social values which impact on the selection, interpretation of historical data and historiography include civil rights, reform on penal practice, removal of inequalities based on race and sex, equity in the distribution of wealth, environmental concerns, and provision of greater liberty for all citizens. But history is not a province of social values alone. Moral values also play a prominent role. Ordinarily, it is the common view that the historian is not expected to pass moral judgments on the private lives of the personalities in his story. Tafawa Balewa, the first and only Nigerian Prime Minister, for instance, might have been a quiet man, but did that have any impact on his historical achievements? This does not mean that personal morality of actors is not important in history, the relevance of such private morality lies entirely on the ability of the historian to demonstrate their effect on his overall story. What is objected to is the historian pronouncing moral judgments on the private lives of individuals who appear in his pages. So then, how do moral valuations legitimately enter historical accounts? That historians have at times seen a link between moral postures and public action is clearly demonstrated by the following: Acton's (Carr, 1961) declaration that the "inflexibility of the moral code is the secret of the authority, the dignity and the utility of History"; Toynbee (Carr, 1961) described Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia in 1935 as a 'deliberate personal sin'; Isaiah Berlin (Carr, 1961) insists that it is the duty of the historian 'to judge Charlemagne or Napoleon or Gengh's or Hitler for their massacres".

Paradoxically, while historians generally renege from passing judgment on the individual actor under certain situations, they indeed relish making such judgments when they serve as alibi for actions that would otherwise be ascribed to society. As Carr (1961) relates: "the French historian, Lefebvre, seeking to exonerate the French revolution from the responsibility of the atrocities and blood bath during the Napoleonic era, attributed them to "the dictatorship of a General - whose temperament …could not easily acquiesce in peace and moderation".

In the same vein, Englishmen, Americans and Russians respectively raise moral sanctions on Chamberlain, McCarthy and Stalin as scapegoats for their collective infractures. Additionally, laudatory moral judgments have also been found to be ready tools for historians. Had some historians not used the fact that some individual slave owners were genial, kind and caring in some circumstances as a support for not condemning the obnoxious slave trade as immoral? Of course, not every historian enshrines the tactics of blaming the individual for happenings in the society. Max Weber (Carr, 1961), for example, drew attention to 'the masters less slavery in which capitalism enmeshes the worker or the debtor' and held the view that judgment ought to be passed on the institution and not on the individuals who created it. From the foregoing what we have is a situation where moral judgment could be passed on the individual actor in his/her own right; on the individual actor as an alibi for society or on the institution itself. Yet, there is a fourth way in which moral issues impinge on history. Now, whether we judge actions in history as good or bad, there must be victors, there must be losers. It thus becomes important to ask: what measure can we use to balance the gain of the many against the loss of the few? Surely, progress of any sort must be at a cost and in trying to weigh the moral imperatives, the historian must aim at balancing the greater good of the many over the forbearance of the few.

At this juncture it would seem helpful to summarize what we have said so far.

SUMMARY

This study brings out in bold relief the fact that at the heart of every genuine historical study there are metaphysical, epistemological and ethical problems. The metaphysical problems arise as a result of the attempts to answer questions such as "what are the historical facts in the case of the study in hand?" The epistemological

questions arise when we wonder how to grasp the meaning of such facts given that they occurred in a past in which we were not present and given also that the circumstances at the time when we are about to undertake an understanding of those facts are quite different. In order to understand these facts, therefore, ought we to empathize with the actors of the past or are we to explore the facts of the past from our own current perspective? As for the moral dimension, the question has always arisen as to whether it is good history to pronounce judgment on past actors in history. Furthermore, if such pronouncements are allowable, which moral values ought to form the benchmark – the contemporary ones or the ones which prevailed at the time the events being studied took place? If we bear these brief remarks in mind, it is then easy to understand the role which philosophy had had to play in the discussion of the various theories of history (e.g. the cyclical and the progressivist theories of history) as discussed in this paper.

In the second half of the paper we considered the type of support history renders to philosophy. Right from the start Heidegger made it clear that being had to be studied from historicity. Philosophy thus emerges and unfolds itself in the historic existential man and his circumstances. The contribution of Darwin, Spencer and Chardin were briefly discussed to show that man's ontology, epistemology and morality could be products of evolution. In time, they could be products of the historical process.

On the whole then, it becomes clear that one cannot pursue an in-depth study of history without an appreciable understanding of philosophy nor can one engage in a serious philosophical investigation without placing his/her study in proper historical perspectives. Really it is a true case of synergies, each energizing the other.

Conclusion

This study was undertaken not so much because we wanted to say what had not been said before but to direct the attention of colleagues and students in departments of philosophy and of history to the very rich area of discourse which is common to them both, but which had been hardly explored. It is therefore hoped that this study will not only serve to stimulate scholars in both fields to undertake more collaborative research but will also provide good justification for student enrichment such that those from one department would take courses in the other. Such enrichment programmes would need to be conducted in such a way that the relevant contribution of both disciplines to any topic being discussed is highlighted. In the long run, it is believed that when history is studied in our universities with in-depth philosophical understanding and meaningfulness and when seen as intricately intermingled with our individual, communal and national lives, the case for reviving and refurbishing the study of history in our secondary schools and other tertiary institutions could be convincingly made. So long as history is presented to our students as a bundle of isolated, unconnected and desultory facts with no far-reaching meaning, so long will the fortunes of history as a discipline decline both at the secondary and tertiary levels of education in our country and indeed in other African countries. The purpose of this investigation then is in part to help enrich our approach to the teaching and study of history and so contribute to stem the unfortunate decline already alluded to the above.

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