A Russellian Perspective on the Socio-Political Challenge of African Philosophy

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Abstract:
Philosophy both as an academic discipline and as a concept has been conceived, interpreted and presented differently by both the learned and the unlearned. Our focus in this article is on the Russellian interpretation of philosophy as a child of circumstance and its implication for doing philosophy in Africa. Adopting the analytic, evaluative and argumentative methods of philosophy, we present a synoptic analysis of the challenge of arriving at a universal definition of philosophy as a precursor to a lucid analysis of Russell's view on the nature of philosophy. Sequel to this, is an articulate identification of the basic challenge of Russell's view to the practice of philosophy in contemporary Africa. Accordingly, we argue that a good knowledge of the history of philosophy buttresses the veracity the Russellian view of philosophy as child of circumstance because all hitherto existing philosophical theories, systems, nay movements are products of and products for the prevailing social and political circumstances. The corollary of this is that one of the major sources of philosophy is the social reality of the philosopher; for the philosopher, does not philosophize in a cultural vacuum, the prevailing circumstances of his/her time always inspires, influences and shapes his/her philosophy. Consequently, the veracity of this view implies that contemporary African philosophy should be inspired, influenced and shaped by the prevailing circumstances in contemporary Africa with the aspiration to influence and shape the social transformation of Africa in the 21st century. Therefore, the socio-political challenge of contemporary African philosophy is to salvage Africa from its dehumanizing socio-economic and political condition in the contemporary world.

Keywords: Africa, African philosophy, Iquism, Interrogatory Theory, Refl-Action, Social Transformation

1. Introduction

Philosophy is unarguably one of the most controversial disciplines. While the layman confuses philosophy with ideology, a guide to life, mysticism, esotericism, religion, witchcraft or spiritism, professional philosophers on the other hand rarely agree on the meaning, nature and scope of their discipline (Uduma2000, p.1-7; Omoregbe 1990, p.1). The point on prominent relief here is that philosophy lacks a univocal definition. This problem of a univocal definition appears to be a perennial one. This is because philosophy is by nature a critical, comprehensive and scopeless discipline (Uduma 2000, pp. 25-28); hence every definition of philosophy is limited or relative to the perspective of a philosopher or group of philosophers. For given the comprehensive and scopeless nature of philosophy, it is difficult or perhaps, impossible to view it from only a given standpoint.

In fact, the comprehensiveness and scopelessness of philosophy is what makes the subject both exciting and frustrating; "exciting because it is the broadest of all disciplines, since it explores the basic concepts which run through all our talking and thinking. It is the most frustrating because its generality makes it extremely difficult" (Kenny 2006, p.13) for the subject to be totally grasped and reduced to simple universal definition. Thus, the comprehensive nature of philosophy makes the subject interesting but difficult to be completely grasped by a particular philosopher or a particular conception of philosophy. Philosophers in their attempt to grasp the totality of philosophy only succeed in reducing philosophy to a given standpoint which they directly or indirectly present as philosophy. This point is substantiated by the fact that "the history of philosophy generally is characterized by revolts and at times outright repudiations of the philosophical practices of preceding philosophers" (Uduma 2004, 1). The major reason that made this dynamism a problem is the traditional Western conception of philosophy.

Traditionally, prior to the onslaught of postmodernism, the predominant Western conception of philosophy that underlies every definition of philosophy is the assumption that philosophy is a critical, universal, objective, and presupposition less discipline whose criteria and findings are trans-culturally and eternally true. In other words, philosophy is, to borrow the words of Oguejiofor, "the march of pure reason, unencumbered and untainted by the specificities of particular conditions" (2006, p.30). In this traditional

Western conception, philosophy is said to have the capacity to "mirror nature" exactly as it is and is as a result regarded as the paradigm of rationality, the overseer of culture and the final tribunal of all forms of human knowledge (Rorty 1979). This traditional Western conception of philosophy sees true philosophy as an activity that is culturally and ideologically neutral (Irele, 1993, pp.6-7). The offshoot of this is that true philosophy is the same everywhere. Hence, in order not to be stigmatized, most philosophers and philosophical movements often claim that its conception of philosophy is the ideal philosophy for judging every form of human undertaking that qualifies to be classified as philosophy.

In contrast to this traditional Western conception of philosophy as the march of pure reason, Bertrand Russell's interpretation of the nature of philosophy as well as his social activism reveal that philosophy is *a child of circumstance.* The ultimate aim of this paper is to expose as well as substantiate the veracity of this Russellian interpretation and its implications for African philosophy in the in the 21st century. However, before we delve into an exposition of Russell's conception of the nature of philosophy, it is necessary we take a succinct look at the biography of the phenomenon called Bertrand Russell.

2. A Brief on Bertrand Russell

Bertrand Arthur William Russell popularly known as Bertrand Russell was born on May 18, 1872 at Ravenscroft in Trelleck, Monmouthshire, United Kingdom. The first six years of Russell's life was struck by the successive biennial death of his parents and grandfather. Russell lost his mother and sister in 1874, lost his father in 1876; and his grandfather, Lord John Russell, a former Prime Minister, in 1878. Hence the education and up-bringing of the baby Russell was determined and supervised by his grandmother, Lady Russell. Russell acquired his early education at home. He later studied Mathematics and Philosophy at Trinity College, Cambridge (Russell 2009, p.xxi).

Although Russell was brought up under a very strict moral and religious condition by his grandmother, but as early as the age of fourteen, Russell has begun to question and reject the moral and religious teachings his grandmother work hard to foist on him. Russell traced his early ability to philosophical reflections to the circumstances surrounding his childhood: "My childhood was solitary, as my brother was seven years older than I was and I was not sent to school. Consequently, I had pleasure for reflection, and when I was fourteen my thoughts turned to theology (Russell 2009, p.3). Be this as it may, Russell grew up to be one of the most celebrated and prolific twentieth century logician, philosopher, freethinker, social critic and controversial writer. Perhaps, in the attempt to explain what propelled him to such an enviable social and intellectual height, Russell in his *Autobiography* explicitly posits:

- Three passions, simple but overwhelmingly strong, have governed my life: the longing for love, the search knowledge, and unbearable pity for the suffering of mankind. These passions, like the great winds, have blown me hither and thither, in a wayward course, over a deep ocean of anguish, reaching the very verge of despair … Love and knowledge, so far as they were possible, led upward to the heavens. But always pity brought me back to the earth. Echoes of the cries of pain reverberate in my heart. Children in famine, victims tortured by oppressors, helpless old people a hated burden to their sons and the whole world of loneliness, poverty, and pain make mockery of what human life should be. I long to alleviate evil, but I cannot, and I too suffer. This has been my life. I have found it worth living, and would gladly live it again if the chance were offered me (1967, p.3-4).

Indeed, nothing best describes the life of Russell than the above citation. In his quest for love, Russell became a serial monogamist; he actually married four wives during his life time. In his quest for knowledge, Russell published numerous books and innumerable articles that blaze trails in diverse aspects of logic and philosophy and which of course earned him the highest academic chair of professor. His passionate concern for the sufferings of mankind made him a social crusader for peace, social justice, religious tolerance, and human rights through writing and social protest. These activities which include his campaign for nuclear disarmaments did not only deny him of academic appointments, but earned him lots of criticisms, imprisonment and ultimately a Nobel Prize for Literature. Russell died on February 2, 1970 at Penrlyndeudraeth, Wales (Irvine, http://plato.standford.edu/entries/russell/). The books and articles he wrote, the ideas he propounded, and the associations he launched are as diverse as the situations that informed them: they were all *products of* and *products for* addressing the prevailing circumstances in a given society at a given point in time. Oguejiofor was therefore right when he observes: "The enormity of Russell's works, the numerous changes of positions are at times staggering" (1994, p.12). Some of his major works includes: *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell* 3 vols., *The Analysis of Matter*, *The Analysis of Mind* , *An Essay on the Foundations of Geometry*, *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits*, *History of Western Philosophy, Principia Mathematica* 3 vols. *PSR (*with Afred North Whitehead*), Why I am Not a Christian and Other Essays, My Philosophical Development, Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays, The Principles of Mathematics, The Problems of Philosophy, Principles of Social Reconstruction, Human Society in Ethics and Politics, Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy* etc.

3. Russell on the Nature of Philosophy

Philosophy according to Russell's elucidations is essentially a comprehensive and critical discipline that attempts to understand, explain and exploit reality through the power of human reason. Human reason is for Russell the universal tool of philosophy; and the universal subject matter of philosophy is reality as a whole. The import of this is that philosophy is a theory of critical discussion or reasoned dialogue about any aspect of reality, be it physical or spiritual. In this direction, Russell writes:

- Philosophy is something intermediate between theology and science. Like theology, it consists of speculations on matters as to which definite knowledge has so far been unascertainable; but like science, it appeals to human reason rather than authority, whether of tradition or that of revelation. All definite knowledge belongs to science; all dogmas as to what

surpasses definite knowledge belong to theology. But between theology and science, there is a no-man's land exposed to attack by both sides; this no-man's land is philosophy (1945, p.3).

The major point on relief here is that philosophy deals with both sensible and supra-sensible realities. In dealing with sensible realities, philosophy seeks explanation beyond the given in search of profound answers and as a result attracts attacks from science. Likewise, in dealing with supra-sensible realities, philosophy appeals to reason and subject all dogmas to the tribunal of rational scrutiny and as such attracts attacks from theology. What this comes to is that the scope of philosophy is neither circumscribed by the empirical world nor is its method entrapped by the dogmas of theology. Philosophy is a repudiator of both science and theology through the act of critical discussion. Philosophy sees nothing as sacrosanct. However, the way a philosopher approaches reality is to a large extent determined by the prevailing socio-economic and political circumstances surrounding the philosopher. To wit, Russell further explains:

- To understand an age or a nation we must understand its philosophy, and to understand its philosophy we must ourselves be in some degree philosophers. There is here a reciprocal causation: the circumstances of men's lives do much to determine their philosophy, but conversely, their philosophy does much to determine their circumstances (1945, p.14).

What the foregoing entails is that every philosopher is in a sense, a child of circumstance. For while the universal tool and subject matter of philosophy are human reason and reality respectively, the way a philosopher use the tool of reason to approach reality as well as the aspect of reality the philosopher choose to approach is to a large extent inspired, shaped and influenced by the prevailing social realities of his/her immediate society. This position has been buttressed by C. S. Momoh and M. A. Makinde. Momoh affirms that: "The greatest minds in philosophy – African, Occidental or Oriental – whether they proclaim it explicitly or not always remain children of their cultures, times, history and experiences" (1993, p.2). Similarly, Makinde re-affirms: "Insofar as everybody belongs to an age or culture, then, to whatever school he or she may belong, a philosopher is first and foremost a person of culture, a product of the education and belief of his society" (2010, p.13). At this point, it is important to warn that this Russellian interpretation of the nature of philosophy can be misconstrued to mean that philosophy is synonymous with culture or that a philosopher is necessarily entrapped by his/her culture.

A proper grasp and rendition of the Russellian interpretation reveals that every philosophy emerges as a reaction to, and/or a consequence of the cultural norms and social realities of a given philosopher in a given society at a given time. Russell position is that: "philosophers are both effects and causes: effects of their social circumstances and of politics and institutions of later ages" (1945, p.7). What this comes to is that philosophy as a comprehensive critical discussion about reality is primarily a reaction of individual philosophers to the prevailing cultural norms and social circumstances of their time in search of plausible answers and perhaps solutions. Thus, far from being synonymous with culture, philosophy is essentially a critique of culture. The philosopher relates to his/her culture by using his/her creative and argumentative powers to make dramatic changes in his/her culture through the revision or total abandonment of old ideas and the introduction of better ones (Makinde 2010, p.14). The offshoot of this is that the prevailing culture and social circumstances of a given society or philosopher serves as the springboard of his/her philosopher. As Momoh explicates:

- A genuine philosophizer like a genuine individual is a child of his experience, times and culture and all philosophizing take place using these influential parameters. A philosopher can write to reflect or react positively, negatively or critically towards his experience, times and culture. A positive reflection can sometimes end up in speculative and holistic system building; a negative reflection may sometimes end up in a devastating and uncompromising criticism and rejection of one's experience, times and culture but a critical reflection can build on the ruins of the latter to erect the former (1993, p.1).

Trailing the above elucidations, one realizes that what Russell is saying is that the prevailing social circumstances of a philosopher are the necessary raw data for philosophical reflection. No philosopher so to say "speaks from a *positionless* position and so also, nobody speaks from a *contextless context*" (Ezeani 2005, p.23). By reflecting critically on the prevailing ideas, of his/her time, the philosopher may end up with either a devastating criticism or deconstruction or reconstruction of the prevailing ideas and cultural norms that create, nay sustain the social circumstances of his/her milieu and in so doing may succeed in generating new beliefs, ideas, systems and norms that will help to initiate social change, as well as mold new cultural norms and social circumstances. In this sense, one discovers that the philosopher becomes a vendor of ideas and a social reformer by reflecting critically upon the social realities of a given milieu (Nweke 2008, p.1-12). "The ultimate aim of any authentic philosophizing subsists … in changing ideas such that through the possession of new or better ideas human beings can effect change in the world through their actions" (Asouzu 2004, p. 6). The veracity of this argument lies in the fact that it is the prevailing social circumstances of human beings that actually propel erudite individuals to reflect, think and invent worthwhile theories to address, and at times arrest or transform the situation.

At this point, it is important to note that the historical veracity of the Russellian interpretation of philosophy as a child of circumstance is not in doubt. Russell has consciously substantiated the historical veracity of his conception in his book on the history of Western philosophy aptly titled *A History of Western Philosophy and Its Connection with Political and Social Circumstances from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*. Although this title necessarily encapsulates Russell's conception of the nature of philosophy, the "Preface" of this monument of a book, explicitly proclaims it:

- Many histories of philosophy exist, and it has not been my purpose to merely add one to their number. My purpose is to exhibit philosophy as an integral part of social and political life: not as the isolated speculations of remarkable individuals, but as both an effect and a cause of the character of the various communities in which different systems flourished … I have aimed at giving so much general history as I thought necessary for the sympathetic comprehension of philosophers in relation to the times that form them and the times they helped to form (1945, p.1).

Indeed, whoever has read Russell's history of Western philosophy will attest to the fact that Russell was able to attain the goal he set for himself. He lucidly transverse the gamut of Western philosophy and unveil the symbiotic relationship between philosophical systems that flourished in a given epoch and the prevailing circumstances that informed them and the ones they helped to form. Thanks to the rise of philosophical hermeneutics and postmodernism in the hitherto absolutist edifice of Western philosophy, this Russellian interpretation of the foundation of philosophy is one of the most accepted conceptions in the contemporary world. Owing to this, our major objective in the remaining sections is not to question the established historical veracity of Russell's position; our aim is to glean out its basic implications for African Philosophy in the contemporary world.

4. The Implications of Russell's Position for African Philosophy

Generally, the basic thesis of the Russellian view that "the circumstances of men's lives do much to determine their philosophy, but conversely, their philosophy do much to determine their circumstances" (1945, 14) has startling implications for doing or studying philosophy anywhere in the world. It fundamentally indicates that for one to understand a given philosophy, one has to study the circumstances that influenced, shaped and inspired it; and since the prevailing social and political circumstances of a people do change from one epoch to another, it will be folly to expect/ insist that different, or even the same individuals, will/should always produce exactly the same philosophical systems under different social and political circumstances. However, our concern here is strictly on its implications for African philosophy.

Specifically, one of the basic implications of Russell's position for African philosophy as a unique and legitimate regional philosophy is that it should be *a product of* and *a product for* addressing the prevailing circumstances in Africa. If African philosophy is exactly the same with other regional philosophies such as Western or Eastern philosophy its relevance will be questionable. Additionally, to present African philosophy as a single monolithic system will be inappropriate. This is because the circumstances that inspired and influenced the development, nay evolution of African philosophy from its earliest time, did not only differ significantly from that of other regions but also differ from one historical epoch to another. The corollary of this is that African philosophy as a vibrant and viable regional philosophy must necessarily house different philosophical systems, schools and movements. And whoever wishes to have an adequate understanding of African philosophy have to study the circumstances that led to the emergence of these diverse philosophical systems and movements.

Against this backdrop one realizes that Russell's position in a sense suggests that a comprehensive history of African philosophy is imperative for an adequate understanding of the nature of African philosophy, and for doing African philosophy. Oguejiofor has consistently argues that writing a comprehensive history of African philosophy is though a very herculean challenge, experts in African philosophy must pay attention towards bringing this gap because this absence of a comprehensive history of African philosophy has inflicted most of its practitioners and students with the problem of "circumstantial ignorance" (2006, pp.28-42; 2008, pp.21-35; 2010, pp.22-25). This is perhaps responsible for the dearth innovative thinking in the discipline (Agada 2013, pp.41-67).

Closely connected to the suggestion for a comprehensive history of African philosophy, Russell's position also implies that the act of presenting the history of Western philosophy in an exclusivist and isolated manner hampers the development of authentic African philosophy. The point on relief here is that the history of Western philosophy should be taught in such a way that it will expose students of Philosophy in Africa to the prevailing socio-economic and political circumstances that inspired each philosopher and how these philosophers came up with ideas to address the circumstance that inspired them. In doing this, the student should be exposed not just to the refined or accepted ideas of Western philosophers; they should also be exposed to their racist, inhuman, unreasonable and unjust ideas (Eze 2003, pp.502-39). This kind of exposition is what will open the eyes of upcoming African philosophers to discover and learn how philosophers are expected to confront the socio-economic and political circumstances of their time. It is a call to present, teach and do philosophy essentially as *Iquism* (pronounced as eye-ku-ism) – the act of "intelligent and pragmatic questioning" in search of plausible answers to human problems at a given place and at a given time and how the questions and answers have been and can be reformulated to address similar problems in different places (Ezeani 2005).

Another very important of the Russellian interpretation for African philosophy is that the universality of philosophy consists solely in its being a critical reflection of an individual on reality in order to understand, explain and exploit it using the power of human reason but in reaction to the prevailing socio-economic and political circumstances of his or her time. The point on relief here is that philosophy is substantially a contextual, flexible and dynamic enterprise (Oguejiofor, 2010, p.5). What this further entails is that true philosophy is a product of circumstances and a product for circumstances. Hence, true contemporary African philosophy must derive its inspiration from the prevailing circumstances in contemporary Africa and as well aspires to address and ultimately arrest the situation. The point underscored here is that philosophers are vendors for social transformation. Every philosopher sets out as a "pathfinder" that "explores the way, which others follow," and seeks to provide the bright light that gives direction to all human undertakings in society" (Asouzu 2004, p.7). In this regard, one of the immediate responsibilities of contemporary African philosophy is to invent ideas that will address, influence, and ultimately transform the dehumanizing socio-economic and political conditions in contemporary Africa. For as Fanon avers that "every generation must out of relative obscurity discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it" (1967, p.166). The question that erupts at this point is to what extent has contemporary African philosophy discover and fulfill its mission? This question calls for a succinct evaluation of African philosophy to the socio-political circumstances in contemporary Africa.

5. Evaluation and Conclusion

According to Wiredu, "The principal driving force of postcolonial African philosophy has been the quest for self-definition" (1). The implication of this is that African philosophy is aware of its social responsibility in contemporary Africa. Asiegbu and Agbakoba also agree with this position when observes that: "Decades of African philosophy relates to the history of Africa's search for identity, to which African philosophers have committed themselves as an important preoccupation" (2004, p.9). The preoccupation of African philosophy with the derogatory historical colonial discourses on Africa/ns is so pervasive that D. A. Masolo book on the history of contemporary African philosophy is adequately titled *African Philosophy in Search of Identity* (1994).Good enough, the themes of most of the conference, public lectures, and symposia of associations and departments of philosophy in universities and seminaries in Africa are essentially concerned with the contemporary condition in Africa. A few examples of these themes are: "African Philosophy and Public Affairs" and "Philosophy, Democracy and Responsible Governance in Africa" (International Conferences, Bigard Memorial Seminary, 1997 and 2003 respectively); "Philosophy and Praxis in Africa" (Conference of the Nigerian Philosophical Association, 2004); "Crisis in Africa at the Beginning of this Millennium: The Response of Philosophy, Science and Religion" (International Philosophy Conference, Seat of Wisdom Seminary, Owerri, 2006); "Philosophy and Conflicts in Africa" and "Philosophical Perspectives on Africa and Global Change" (World Philosophy Day Symposia, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, 2006 and 2011 respectively); "50 Years of OAU/AU: Revisiting the Questions of African Unity, Identity and Development" and "Rethinking African Identity and Culture" (Annual Conferences of the International Society for African Philosophy and Studies, 2013 and 2014 respectively); "Sustaining Post-Centenary Nigeria Through Indigenous Philosophies" (2nd Inter-University Postgraduate Debate, organized by Graduate Research Forum, University of Calabar, 2014).

The few themes listed above tend to show that African philosophy has discovered and is striving to fulfill its mission of addressing the condition in Africa. African philosophers are expected to confront these conditions by propounding ideas, principles and theories that will help to enlighten the populace, reconstruct their societies, revitalize their people, and renew themselves towards "regaining the capacity for self-conscious, self-directed change towards freedom, justice and human well-being" (Oladipo 2009, p.137). Against this backdrop, one have to note that in spite of the gross engagement with the contemporary social and political circumstances in Africa, African philosophy is yet to generate the kind of public enlightenment and alternative socio-economic, political or scientific-technological systems that have been able to influence the significant transformation of their socio-economic and political circumstances in many African countries even after more than five decades of political independence. What this comes to is that African philosophers merely analyze and discuss the prevailing social and political circumstances in most African countries without developing "a coherent theoretical framework" that will transform Africa (Akpan, 2009, p.591).

The import of this is that African philosophers are yet to construct influential philosophical systems that can accelerate the mental, political and socio-economic transformation of Africa/ns: "The poverty of African philosophy whether yesterday or today is the apathy towards system building and development (Akpan 2009, p.589)" The result of this is that their philosophical reflections make little or no influence on their society. More so, their negligence for system-building tends to present African philosophy as "*patchwork* philosophy" (Asouzu 2007, p.58). The paucity of system in African Philosophy is traced to Western indoctrination. Chinweizu argues that the West through the instrumentality of Western education "miseducated" Africans and inflicted them with an "intellectual meningitis" that have influenced them to "automatically uphold and habitually employ" Western conceptual schemes in all matters in the belief that the Western standpoint is the only legitimate standpoint on every issue (Chinweizu 1978, p.xiv). Similarly, Agbo posits: "The colonizers took advantage of the real meaning of "education" as "domestication," and proceeded to engrave Western values into the flash of the African, Western ideals into his thoughts, and practically injected Westernization and Europeanization into his DNA" (2015, p.219). The veracity of this claim is a challenge African philosophy must ameliorate rather than a justification for its prolonged entrapment in "perverse/unnecessary dialogues" on the very possibility of doing African philosophy (Vest 2009, pp.1-23).The prolonged deconstructive preoccupation of African philosophy with the erroneous Eurocentric denigration of the African to the detriment of some of the teething issues in contemporary African is responsible for what has be described as the "crisis of relevance" (Oladipo 2000, p.15; Asiegbu 2009, pp.36-64).

A critical reflection on the kind of education Africans receive even in many postcolonial African countries does not effectively equip them with the capacity for the innovative task of systematic confrontation with African existential challenges. Not only is the teaching of philosophy in Africa dominated by Western philosophy, it is also taught from a Western perspective. This point has been buttressed by many scholars (Oguejiofor 2010; Makinde 2010; Chimakonam, 2015). Trailing this, one understands that there is a dire need for the contextualization of philosophy in Africa. This contextualization will prepare and equip upcoming African philosophers with the necessary skills for systematic critical analysis and interpretation of social issues geared toward authentic resolutions. It will further promote the development of systematic African philosophy that is a product of an individual critical reflection on reality and at the same time relevant to the prevailing social and political circumstances that inspire its excogitation. Therefore, the major point that is validly deducible from this evaluation is that though African philosophers have and are striving to fulfil the mission of their generation by confronting the prevailing African condition through the process of critical analysis and interpretation, they are yet to generate the expected result. African philosophers are yet to generate alternative systems that will influence significant social change in contemporary Africa. "Philosophers must have the power to corrupt society which means they should be able to make society to reject those values that could hold them captive and make it embrace liberating values" (Ezeani 2005, p.17).

In view of the above African philosophy will significantly orchestrate the social transformation of Africa by specifically responding meaningfully to the prevailing existential socio-political challenges of bad governance in 21st century Africa. The basic challenge today is of the contemporary Africans is not the perception of the non-African about them; it is the inability or/and unwillingness of

their leaders to govern them responsibly and accelerate a desirable egalitarian society characterized by peaceful co-existence, social justice, mutual love, respect for human rights as well as equal opportunities to meaningful employment that will enable every citizen to be able to meet his/her basic needs. Herein lies the immediate socio-political challenge of African philosophy. The possibility for it to address this challenge depends on the extent African philosophers would be able expose their students to the principles of *Interrogatory Theory* (Chimakonam 2014, pp.1–25) and *Refle-action* (Agbo 2013, pp.423-61) not just in the classroom but also in their works as social gadflies. These principles support the thesis of *Iquism that philosophy is fundamentally the act of incessant intelligent and pragmatic questioning of social circumstances and institutions in order to generate new principles or/and elicit positive actions for social transformation.*

Summarily, the major point buttressed in this article is that for Russell, philosophy though a universal activity is a child of circumstance. Hence, philosophy is by nature contextual, flexible and dynamic in its origin and approach towards meeting human needs and solving problems in a given society at a particular time. The life and activities of Russell both as a philosopher, social critic, writer and moral crusader epitomize this position. This why Russell in the inside cover of one the collection of some of his innumerable essays titled *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell*, boldly asserts: "I am in no degree ashamed of having changed my opinions…" (2009).Consequently, we argue that Russell's position suggests that every philosopher is inspired by the prevailing circumstances of his/her time and as well aspires to transform these circumstances by reflecting critically on his/her experience in search of alternative ideas that can address them. Our conclusion is that this suggestion among other things ultimately implies that contemporary African philosophy ought to draw its inspiration from the prevailing socio-economic and political circumstances in contemporary Africa, and in doing this, African philosophers should aim at building viable philosophical systems that can address these problems in a holistic manner.

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