

TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE HUMANISM

M. E. ABAM, Ph.D.

Abstract

The emphasis on difference whether ideological, cultural or otherwise has blurred the minds of mankind to that which is truly human thereby creating myriads of problems for peoples of the world. Never in the history of the world have we found mankind as polarized as is the case today. This polarity, a corollary of 'difference' has generated tensions ranging from ethnicity, religion, corruption, cronyism, nepotism, terrorism, banditry, etc. The challenges are as a result of emphasis on the 'us' and the 'they'. In the face of global pandemic such as we witness today, it is expedient that we de-emphasize difference that divide mankind and evoke and evolve for himself truly humanistic moral virtues that could help to not only reaffirm but embrace our shared humanism that is pivotal to surmounting the hydra-headed concerns currently bedeviling the human race. The analytical, historical, critical and reconstructive methods of philosophy were employed. The analytical method helped in clarifying concepts like humanism, inclusiveness, communalism that are very central to the problematic. The critical and historical methods were employed to examine some theories relating to humanism. Finally the reconstructive method was adopted to establish the truism that until we all agree to be more humane than we currently are, the world may never surmount the challenges created by emphasis on difference. The paper recommends that relative global peace is only possibly if and only if cultures, traditions, identity groups, races and religions open up to each other in their quest for a more humanized world.

Key words: Humanism, Inclusiveness, Ubuntu, Communalism.

INTRODUCTION

We are living in desperate times where the very nature of most people has become to say the least wicked. The world is gradually receding to the 'Hobbesean' state of nature where men and cultures are becoming selfish, individualistic and conflictive. In Nigeria alone the degree of wickedness perpetuated by the state, cultures and communities as well as individuals has reached fever peak. There have been different stories of assassinations in Kaduna, Benue, Taraba, Zamfara, Plateau, Enugu, Delta, Rivers to mention but a few. Nigerian Highways are no longer safe safe due to the onslaught of bandits. The same bandits have ransacked many villages in the North leaving sorrows, tears and blood on their trail. There is the menace of Boko Haram and marauding killer herdsmen in the North East and Middle Belt. In Mali the Tuaregs are making the state very unsafe for civil governance. Same is found in Guinea Bissau, Congo, Burundi etc and of recent the xenophobic attacks in South Africa. One can go on enumerating where

tensions have built up the world over. This paper investigates the essence of our humanity and how a relative global humanism can be achieved that can lead to reduced tensions of identities as well as man's inhumanity to man. The chapter makes the point that it is only in the face of reduced tensions can a true human global order can be attained where individuals in spite their cultural standpoints can actualize their ultimate goals as members of the human specie. I shall adopt the analytical, critical and reconstructive methods of philosophy to achieve my quest.

Humanism Conceptualized

Most people use the word humanism yet do not let us into what it connotes. The idea of humanism is not new because it has been in use for a long time. This may be why J. Herrick writes that “the word has developed since its use to describe a belief system that calls upon reason and values to enable us develop our lives and our societies.” (Herrick, 2003:1). At times adjectives like 'scientific humanism,' 'ethical humanism,' 'religious humanism,' etc. are used. These adjectives are only added for clarity purpose. Therefore, humanism can be said to be a system of thought that questions existing ideas with the aim and quest for new ones. This definition does not in any way capture in its entirety what humanism means but rather gives us a bird eye view towards the demystification of the concept. The best way of doing justice to the word in question is to approach it from an historical perspective. To this end, humanism is traced from ancient through renaissance to enlightenment and to contemporary times. In the ancient period, a group from Miletus a Greek colony on the coast of Asia Minor, took up the major questions of what constituted our universe. One of them was Thales who said all existence was based on water. Anaximander is thought to have written a book *On Nature* that survived in fragments. Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes set out the naturalistic view that everything is matter. The drama and sculpture of ancient Greece shows a preoccupation with the entirely human which was new to human culture at that time. This human element introduced into Hellenistic culture of old found outlet in the capturing of human form on stone. More so, the great philosopher Socrates introduced a humanist method of philosophical inquiry in his preferred use of the dialectics (Herrick, 1). Aristotle also borrowed a leaf from this in his *Ethics – Nicomachean* and *Eudemonia* are based entirely on the human.

In the renaissance, classical learning was revived giving rise to the emergence of city life in countries like Italy. This led to the increase in trade, prosperity and leisure time for most city dwellers giving rise to the use of the phrase *studia humanitas* to refer to the humanities. Vittorina da Fletro, Giovanni Bruno, Michel Montaigne, even Bacon all made their contributions to humanism in different ways at this epoch. In the enlightenment, the work of J. S. Mill, *Analysis of the influence of Natural Religion on the temporal Happiness of Mankind* (1822) also avers to humanism. Here Mill puts forward arguments that could help man build society especially his emphasis on education. He capped his humanism with the ethical thesis of utilitarianism that calls for the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people. And it is still in the spirit of humanism that people can today argue about the notions of fundamental human rights. The formation of the U. N. is yet a corollary of the spirit of humanism.

Having made that point, we can define humanism as that idea that attempts to

64

return to humans the power and definition of our being – a return from narrative or textual notions of our being to the human condition and human experience as we live it in the present age. This may be why Herrick states that “humanism is a way to live, to give meaning to life and to find and understand our place in society and, indeed the universe” (Herrick, 3). This is to say that humanism focuses on specific human abilities especially the ability of each of us to reason out the world and our being within it, and has concentrated on science and the scientific method to distill and clarify the ways in which we can obtain truth about the world, and potentially about the human.

A Note on Exclusivism

Against the background provided, it is an open truth that the world has been grappling with lots of issues as a result of exclusiveness that bring our quest for humanism to question. Assassinations, kidnappings, terrorism, corruption, genocides to mention but a few all mitigate our search for global humanism. This exclusivism is responsible for the call for self determination in countries like Nigeria, Ethiopia, Morocco among others. These calls for secession are mostly as a result of individualism that has mitigated the gains for collectivity. Many people are now more than ever disenchanted with the political class because of their quest for personal gains. The political class is more interested in power, status and position to the detriment of the wellbeing of the citizenry. Injustice permeates the Nigerian political space because religious bigots, tribalists and croynists claiming to be champions of Nigeria's problems are now the people in leadership position. These individuals lack a sense of commitment and inclusive humanism that is the reason they appoint only people from their villages, towns and cities to positions of authority even when they are the least qualified for such positions. In this regard, there is no iota of meritocracy in appointments except the criterion of being a tribesman. This completely negates the tenets of inclusiveness hence the attending problems that bedevil not only Nigeria, but Africa as a whole. The cause of all of these challenges are reducible to one factor a dearth of inclusive humanism.

Inclusivism

Pessimists have been making the point that an inclusive humanism given the events of our world is only but an illusion because the future is definitely going to see an increasing number of anarchic, small wars similar to Somalia, particularly over decreasing resources as Nigeria is currently witnessing with killer herdsmen. For the optimist which is the thrust or standpoint of this paper, our cosmopolitan global communication will help us attain a more hopeful and humane world. There is now something one can call a global melting pot where a high sense of globality can be forged. But the question now is; how do we achieve an inclusive humanism? I will be using the reconstructive method of philosophy to reconstruct the thoughts of some theorists to making our quest for inclusive humanism better entrenched. Sarles responds to the above question by saying that an inclusive humanism can only be possible if we continue to hope for a better future for mankind. This idea of futurity according to him

will help men live peaceably with one another in the hope of the future bliss that will come hereafter. For Fanon, as expressed by Nayar, an ethics of recognition of difference within the postcolonial paradigm is the first step en route an inclusive humanism because through mutual recognition subjectivities

are forged giving rise to a truly humanist vision. To achieve this, Fanon proposes that oppressed peoples join up with peoples who are already sovereign to build a world in the dimension of universalism (Nayar, 2011:21-35). In the same vein Russell as quoted by Herrick writes that we can attain a humanized world if:

We care for what is noble, for what is beautiful, for what is gentle.
To allow moments of insight to give wisdom at more mundane
times and to see in my imagination the society that is to be created,
where individuals grow freely, and where hate and greed die
because there is nothing to nourish them (Herrick, 11).

These goals of Russell may never be realized if mankind fails to resolve the fundamental problems confronting him – the problem of multiplicity; the one and the many in terms of culture and religion etc. (Mclean, 2004:204). To solve this problem according to Mclean there is need for convergence of cultures where everyone will recognize that:

1. All are created equal and therefore free – and hence peace lies in the mutual promotion of the pursuit of human fulfillment.
2. That the human person is essentially relational – and hence our futures are so bound together as to require mutual recognition, respect and cooperation, and
3. That peace can be had only from the free pursuit of harmony and hence in a global age, “blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall possess the land” (Mclean, 204205).

Selected Theories of Humanism

So far I have been making a general analysis as to how a more humane world could be attained. Put differently my interest is on making possible an inclusive humanism. I shall at this juncture attempt to be more systematic by trying to use different theories to interrogate the problematic. In this vein, I shall be considering the African idea of community otherwise called communalism, existentialist humanism and African Christian humanistic value theory of Ehusani.

African Communalism

There is no gainsaying the fact that in many African cultures, the idea of the individual person is, for the most part tied to the idea of community. The community here is characterized as a life community in which there is an intimate personal interaction among human beings as opposed to the recently impersonal modern Western set-up where everyone minds his or her own business. In a typical African setting, community is neither to be understood in the additive sense of a non-organic bringing together of atomic individuals into a unit akin to an association. In the African sense, there is an assumed organic dimension to the relationship between the component individuals that form the community. The community here is defined as a group of people who together experience reciprocity of awareness (Ogbuja 2006:9). The existence of common ties, and biological bonds, interdependent relationships, common

interests, and goals is crucial to an adequate sense of community; that in fact constitutes a people into a community, into a social train driven by communalism. This may be why George Ehusani writes that:

The African values community living not only because “it is good for kinsmen to do so,” but because life is his or her ultimate concern, and that life can only grow in relationships. Outside the community there is no life. To excommunicate oneself or to be excommunicated from the community is to be dead (1991:221).

This phenomenon was captured in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* when Okonkwo was excommunicated from his community. He went to his mother's people and never felt at home throughout his sojourn at his maternal family (Achebe, 1958:99). This is so because the traditional African does not retreat from people but rather he is interested in people since energy and life is drawn and found among persons.

More so, it is an open fact that the African sense of family and kinship cannot be rivaled hence the celebrated institution of extended family where nobody is 'a nobody'. This system provides security against the negative vicissitudes of life like death, crop failure etc. in fact you can live your whole life in a traditional African community without ever purchasing or owning a lighter or a box of matches yet always have fire to cook your meals. This is because you are free to get burning coals from anywhere you find smoke rising. The virtue of being hospitable to strangers that flows from the African spirit of solidarity and togetherness is one that places the African on the lead step to bringing about an all inclusive humanism.

In the same vein, Julius Nyerere, one of Africa's foremost advocates for communalism is of the opinion that for Africa and Africans and indeed the human race to live peaceably, the principle of '*Ujamaa*' must be imbibed. '*Ujamaa*' is a Kiswahili word that means '*familihood*' or '*brotherhood*'. It is an attempt to build communalism from the extended family system and brotherhood of traditional Africa. *Ujamaa* signifies a set of ideas and principles, a mass ideology, a programme of action and an African brand of socialism. According to Nyerere, African socialism must be rooted in our past – in the traditional society which produces us – the recognition of society, an extension of the family unit. Through *Ujamaa* Nyerere wanted to recapture the old African social order where everybody was his brother's keeper and where there were no unemployed adults. To him traditional society serves as a guide to us on how to attain intrinsic good both materially and psychologically. He maintains that in traditional Africa, every man contributes to the general pool for the general welfare. This is exemplified in the common ownership of land which every generation held in trust and exercise sacred responsibility to the future generation (Yekini, 2004:252). One of the tenets of *Ujamaa* is the rejection of individualism. Individualism is alien to the African. Another is the idea of hard work. In traditional African societies, everyone worked for the wellbeing of the entire community. Idleness was considered a social sin. “Treat your guest as a guest for two days on the third day you give him the *jembe* (hoe)” is a famous

African aphorism. The universal applicability of *ujamaa* as means to attaining global humanism finds expression in these words:

Ujamaa requires that the traditional attitude of mind be projected outward to incorporate not only every Tanzanian but all mankind. Thus, the crusade will not only rediscover and revitalize native values but extend these present parochial values to the entire human race (28).

If global humanism must be attained, it is pertinent we imbibe these African virtues of one being his brother's keeper as exemplified in the dignity placed on human worth. If beauty indeed inheres in the human person, peoples of the world ought to strive to be more accommodating to all irrespective of their skin colour, religious affinity or cultural background. We have to transcend the barriers individualism placed on us to becoming truly human. Being human implies sociability with the ultimate belief 'I am because you are, and because you are, therefore I am.' The worth of an individual is tied to the global community, therefore we have to protect it, because in protecting it we are invariably protecting ourselves since our fates are bound in the collective.

African Christian Humanistic Theory

Another theory of humanism worth considering is what George Ehusani calls 'the African Christian humanistic theory.' Ehusani holds that the great threat to human survival is the senseless pursuit of a lopsided technological development. In his words: Western technological development has brought a lot of good to the world, it has also polarized a dysfunctional worldview, and a destructive axiology. Western technological civilization has traded half-truths and illusions to all the lands of its conquest, and these halftruths and illusions have largely been accepted as the reality (Ehusani, 1991:242).

Ehusani is making the point that any form of development that neglects the human person by presenting itself as if humanity was created for development and not development for humanity misses the mark because this lopsided development model defines the 'human' by how much he eats, how fast he travels, and how well he uses space and people neglecting the very essence of who and what he really is which is the core of being human.

Against this background, Ehusani's African Christian humanism serves as an alternative to the lopsided agenda put forward by the West – a system that has turned man into what material benefit he can add to society and not his worth as someone divinely created. This point was again reemphasized by Ehusani by quoting Pope John VI. He writes that any meaningful development must give “priority of ethics over technology, primacy of persons over things, and the superiority of spirit over matter ” (Ehusani, 242). A theorist enthused that there will not be a thing as developed nation unless that nation has been able to make its people live together in harmony. Put differently, development is worthless that is not channeled towards global unity and harmony that begins at the individual level.

Existentialist Theory of Humanism

Another point worthy of note in our quest for global humanism is existentialism. Existentialism in this sense is seen as the opening up of subjectivities. Some have argued that existentialism is a purely subjective philosophy that may never aid our quest for global humanism. Olatunji Oyeshile argues in the negative. He holds that the claim that existentialism is purely subjective:

Is at variance with the tenet of existentialism in the sense that there is an inbuilt regulator of human freedom, which is found in inter subjectivity. In other words when we pursue the concept of individual freedom to its logical conclusion, it could be discerned that it allows for the freedom of others in spite of impressions to the contrary. This is found in Sartre's Statement that "when I choose for myself, I choose for others" (Oyeshile 2005:26).

What can be gleaned from this statement is that even though we all pursue our respective lives differently as free beings, our freedom is also tied to the freedom of others. In other words, it is the freedom of others that define my freedom as a unique and different individual. Oyeshile used Theodoros Kiros, Martin Heidegger, J. P. Sartre, Merleau Ponty and Gabriel Marcel to provide answer to the question: how can we live together in a more humanized world? Heidegger's analysis of '*Dasien*' attempts an answer. *Dasien* means man as being there in the world that is to say, the basic condition or state of man (*Dasien*). Heidegger provided a novel analysis and interpretation by further elucidating the essential features of *Dasien* (man). Heidegger is saying here that the very idea of being in the world underscores being with others. Oyeshile writes that "Heidegger although reemphasizes over and over again why the *Dasien* should be authentic, nevertheless allows for the consideration of others in interpersonal relation which is also a basis for multiethnic harmony" (Oyeshile, 32). What he is saying in essence is that even though primarily, *Dasien* refers to the individual in the world, he does not exist in the world alone as there are others that one way or the other will affect his being there in the world. To attain global humanism Oyeshile recommends that:

As *Dasien*s, both at the individual and ethnic group levels, survival is only possible if and only if we recognize the importance of others not as mere objects standing in the way of achieving our goal of survival, but as ends in themselves who are not only important but also inevitable and inescapable in the realization of our goal of survival and freedom (32).

We see a tincture of Immanuel Kant in Oyeshile especially where Kant asks that we should always see human beings as ends in themselves and not as means to various ends. From the above postulations, we can surmise that for Heidegger, global humanism is possible if we apply the simple but yet difficult principle of live and let live. His principle of *thrownness* invariably binds humanity together seeing that we are all thrown

into the world together irrespective of race, tribe, religion, culture etc. whether we like it or not, we are condemn to living together so we have to make it work. As rational beings, Heidegger will want us to pursue peace because such is our *facticity*. The notions of *anxiety* and *anguish* caused by the fear of the unknown should guide the hearts and minds of *Dasiens* towards global harmony. *Dasiens* cannot prolong or have the freedom to actualize his essence in a world of strife, discord, and disharmony. A world of this kind will only help re-emphasize the *nothingness* *Dasiens* tries to run away from. Global humanism is possible when we all affirm our *authentic* selves while not jeopardizing the freedom others equally have to express theirs.

Furthermore, Sartre's analysis of the nature of existence gives direction on how to attain global humanism. Underlying his postulations on existentialism is his position that unlike other objects, man possesses consciousness. For this reason he is related the world of things and people in different ways. It is the possession of consciousness that will guide Sartre towards humanism. As conscious beings, we are aware of the plight of other conscious beings in the world. We need others to be able to carve out our essences. We exist, we find ourselves here because there are no prescriptions and we must define, decide for ourselves the kind of persons we want to be. The essence thus follows existence.

In existentialism, the question of identity is central: basically, who am I? Sartre thought that we are, in principle free to define our identity. There is no script for our roles, there is no 'essence' that tells us who we are and what we ought to be. We are all free, and we all bear the responsibility to find answer. Sartre's answer to attaining global humanism rest in his two modes of existence – being in itself and being for itself. The main feature of being for itself is the inability of being acted on from without while that of being in itself is characterized in terms of a complete incapacity for any relationship to itself. The bottom line of Sartre's exegesis is that in human society we engage each other in mutual reciprocity. Oyeshile captures this well when he writes that:

Sartre's subjectivism adequately provides for the existence of other consciousness in the world. Sartre believes that the self must first be for the others as a precondition for having consciousness of himself and others as being for him. What all these show is that as individuals and groups, we have our various and latent manifest identities; we cannot overlook the importance of others and we must accommodate them, because it is when we accommodate them that they will also accommodate us (Oyeshile, 36).

This is exactly what Albert Camus put in a different way when he made the call for humans all over the world to come together to confront their common enemy *nosea*. For him, in the face of human calamities especially one caused by our inability to accommodate one another in spite of our differences, humankind cannot afford to stand aloof or remain apathetic to human suffering. By dint of sheer human solidarity, we must come together to fight against all manner of injustice and cruelty: man's

inhumanity to man. Man must submit to fate but at the same time impose meaning to life. We must defy the tendency to hate each other with a rebellious spirit – instead of hate, we must love. Out of our existential predicament, must solidarity arise to counter the weight of our meaninglessness. We see this clearly in *The Plague* where men irrespective of their creed, position, religion, culture, tradition etc had no choice but to bond together to confront their common enemy – the bubonic plague. In our case, our common enemy lies in our inability to see each other as brothers and sisters that have more in common than the few things that tend to separate us. If global humanism must be attained from an existentialist perspective, we must recognize that we are beings with other beings in the world who are all in dire need of actualizing their essences. This can only be possible if all men come together in solidarity to look for means of overcoming their perceived differences that has led to all sorts of problems for the human race.

CONCLUSION

I started my analysis on humanism by first looking at the problematic from an historical perspective – the ancient, medieval/renaissance, modern and contemporary times to underscore the point that the search for that which is truly human did not begin today. This is due to the fact that global humanism is a precondition for global peace. We should not lose track of the fact that to attain peace, we must require mutual collaboration from others mutually proportionate with what we give in the harboring of partnership of individuals, communities, cultures and civilizations. Humankind must try to overcome their idiosyncrasies by opening up to one another in the spirit of truth and common brotherhood. For this to be possible, all humankind must desire peace since it is the most rational thing to do. Instead of monologue dialogue must be encouraged, instead of injustice and intolerance, justice and fairness should be pursued, instead of terrorism and wars, we must pursue the virtue of 'live and let live'. To say the least, an inclusive global humanism is attainable in the face of 'communicative communion of world races.'

Global humanism is captured in the African sense in the word '*ubuntu*.' The essence of *ubuntu* is to promote a culture of peace, tolerance, peaceful coexistence and mutual development. As a humanist concept, *ubuntu* is based on the principle of reciprocity, inclusiveness and a high sense of shared destinies among and across communities. I conclude by making the point that humanism is not an ideal that cannot be reached but rather an attainable mode of existence that could engender human flourishing if and only if individual wills are sacrificed for the good of the collective.

REFERENCES

Achebe, C. 1958. *Things Fall Apart*. England: Heinemann.

Herrick, J. 2003. *Humanism: An Introduction*. Ibadan: Gadfly Publishers.

Mclean, G. W. 2004. *Persons, Peoples and Cultures: Living together in a global age.* Washington Council for Research in Philosophy.

Ogbuja, C. N. “The place of the ordinary person in African communalistic society” A Seminar Paper presented to the Nigerian Philosophical Association at the University of Ibadan, 2006 (Unpublished).

Yekini, A. S. 2004. “Ujamaa the political and social thought of Mwalimu Julius Nyerere” In Asouzu I. (Ed) *Philosophy and Logic Today.* Calabar: University of Calabar Press.

Oyeshile, O. 2005. *Reconciling the Self with the other.* Ibadan: Hope Publication.

Ehusani, G. O. 1991. *An Afro-Christian Vision “Ozovehe” Towards a more Humanized World.* New York: University press of America.

Nayar, A. “Reinventing the world” www.newworldbooks.org. sourced 5th June, 2011.

