

Hegel and the Problem of Unity in Plurality of Philosophies

.....

Nana Kwasi AMOATENG¹

University of Warwick, United Kingdom

amoatengelvis@gmail.com

Abstract: *This article offers an extensive critique of Hegel's attempt to unify philosophy from a European viewpoint. It provides an in-depth analysis of this German philosopher's ideas in his Introduction to the lectures on the history of philosophy. The article principally argues for multiple origins of philosophy and the history of philosophy as opposed to Hegel's one European vision. It highlights the biases and unfounded claims in Hegel's philosophy that have been problematic for contemporary philosophers. Finally, it argues that in spite of the many weaknesses in this German philosopher's thought, some of his views are still relevant today.*

Key words: philosophy, history of Philosophy, Hegel, Africa, Europe, unity, plurality

INTRODUCTION

This article² analyzes Hegel's attempt to seek one European origin and truth about philosophy from his study of the history of philosophy. It largely carries out an in-depth critique of Hegel's *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. Many are the critiques that have been leveled against Hegel as far as the content of his history of philosophy is concerned. Hegel has been accused of being Eurocentric, German-centric, and racist because he put the European world

1 Nana Kwasi Amoateng is an independent researcher based in Ghana. His research interests include international relations, African philosophy, African history, and international political economy.

2 This article is largely based on Hegel's *Introduction to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. I used the 1985 English translation of Knox and Miller, which relies on the German text that was edited by Hoffmeister. The translation of Knox and Miller is older than the new critical edition of Garniron and Jaeschke, published by Felix Meiner in 1986. However, I used the translation of Knox and Miller since I did not have access to an English translation of the new critical edition. It is important to state though that the translation of Knox and Miller is reliable notably because they also use Garniron's French translation Hegel, G. W. F., *Introduction to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, translated in English by Knox, T. M. and Miller, A. V., New York: Oxford University Press, 1985, pp. v-vi.

at the heart of philosophy. For instance, Duquette has argued that: "Hegel's Eurocentrism is undeniable and raises serious questions about criteria for inclusion in a holistic account of the history of philosophy, presuming that there is some universal tradition of philosophy, and that there can or must be unity in its narrative account." (D. A. Duquette (ed.), 2003, p. 7.). Even though most of the criticisms directed at Hegel are valid, some of his critics have sought to counter his thought, especially his views on non-European societies, without sufficiently paying attention to the foundation of his philosophy. It is normal for non-European scholars to feel aggrieved as, for example, Hegel unjustifiably attributed both the beginning of philosophy and the fully developed philosophy to Europe. Nevertheless, in spite of these critiques, Hegel has been extensively studied in contemporary philosophy. (F. C. Beiser, 1993, p. 1).

In the lectures on the history of philosophy, Hegel tasked himself with the project of correcting the traditional conception of the history of philosophy as a history of contradictory opinions or views. Pure multiplicity of philosophies, according to Hegel, cannot have the last word in the history of philosophy, for "they all have in common the character of being philosophies." (G. W. F. Hegel, 1985, p. 17). Thus, philosophy is about one truth, according to Hegel. One problem that arises from this argument is: how is it possible for philosophy to have a history? For Hegel makes it clear that philosophy aims at knowing truth, which is imperishable, eternal and absolute (G. W. F. Hegel, 1985, p. 11). Is it possible to have a history of a reality such as one truth, which is eternal? If philosophy has a history and history is ordinarily understood as a display of series of past ideas, then it is problematic to find truth in philosophy since Hegel admitted that truth is not a transient reality belonging to the past (G. W. F. Hegel, 1985, p. 11). Hegel resorted to the concept of development to resolve the problem of multiplicity and historicity of philosophy. But does Hegel's concept of development which ultimately implies a total unification of philosophy really resolve the problem of historicity and plurality of philosophy?

In general, Hegel's history of philosophy highlights the development of human thought embedded in truth as Idea. To do this, Hegel follows a similar approach of the Romantics who, before him, had proposed the possibility of attributing the origin of philosophy to the East. Hegel refuted any philosophical position that attributed the origin of philosophy to other geographical locations outside Greece. He referred to the truth that Pythagoras drew his philosophy from the Egyptians and Indians as a 'universally propagated tale.' (G. W. F. Hegel, 1985, p. 30). Instead, he attributed the one origin and the most developed philosophy to the West. The basic position of the article is to argue for multiplicity as the essential character of philosophy since different aspects of Hegel's account excessively restricts the definition

of philosophy and oversimplifies elements that constitute philosophy and its history.

The article principally argues for multiple origins of philosophy and the history of philosophy as opposed to Hegel's one European vision. This implies that, in contrast to Hegel's narrow European view of philosophy, there are multiple identities of philosophy. This helps to resolve the fundamental problem of unity that makes Hegel's history of philosophy 'unfriendly' not only to non-European audiences, but to contemporary European audiences as well. To do this, the article offers an extensive critique of Hegel's history of philosophy, particularly in the third section after explaining this German author's ideas in the first two sections. In section A, I delve into discussions regarding the principle of unity which Hegel used to account for the history of philosophy. This concept of unity is elaborated in the light of Hegel's understanding of development. In section B, a good overview of Hegel's description of the distinctive character of the unity of philosophy is given. A detailed description of what Hegel identifies as the historical progression of philosophy is presented. Section C highlights a number of shortcomings in Hegel's history of philosophy. Based on the analysis, it argues for multiple beginnings, origins and identities of philosophy. The article concludes by highlighting both the relevance of Hegel's history of philosophy and the need to transcend its limitations.

1. Unity as the Fundamental Basis of Hegel's History of Philosophy

As a point of departure, it is imperative to know how Hegel approached the understanding of philosophy. It is by knowing what informed the primary approach of Hegel in relation to the fundamental structure of philosophy that we can make sense of why he approached the history of philosophy in the manner he did. From Hegel's perspective, the first point to note is that philosophy must be understood as the ultimate flourishing of the whole historical process. To talk about historical process is to allude to the different aspects of the life of a society such as constitution, form of government, morality, and religion. Hegel was convinced that at some point in the historical process, people begin to philosophize. The latter generally starts at a point where people withdraw from public life and enter into the domain of pure thinking (G. W. F. Hegel, 1985, p. 26). The ultimate flourishing of the entire historical process means that people in a philosophical society must mature adequately in order to philosophize. According to Hegel, it is from one group of people that one specific philosophy appears at every epoch and there is one specific essence of philosophy which cuts across all other aspects of the life of a society. In order to arrive at reflecting on the one specific essence of European philosophy, Hegel set out to do the following: to know the aim and object of the history of philosophy; to indicate

what needs to be included as well as what has to be excluded from the history of philosophy; and then to map out the different periods that make up the history of philosophy (G. W. F. Hegel, 1985, p. 8).

Even though he understood philosophy from a purely European viewpoint, Hegel argued that there can only be *one* philosophy. In spite of the wide range of philosophies that a person can find, every philosophy in the proper sense of Hegel's understanding must conform to *one truth*. In this vein, he argued that "the starting-point and aim of philosophy is to know this *one* truth as at the same time the source from which everything else merely flows, all laws of nature, all phenomena of life and consciousness; they are only reflections of it." (G. W. F. Hegel, 1985, p. 18). To talk about one truth is another way of saying that all philosophies must conform to the one *universal* philosophy, which is essentially European philosophy for this German philosopher. He highlighted that "the universal contains its specification in itself, that the Idea is in itself the absolute unity of differences, this is where a strictly philosophical proposition begins." (G. W. F. Hegel, 1985, p. 19). The distinct character of the one European philosophy for Hegel is that it has the ability to *unify* the differences that exist in all philosophies. For him, it is at the point where this unity of differences appears that marks the proper beginning of philosophy.

As part of the examples which Hegel used to explain the concept of unity, he picked the example of a red rose. The latter, even in its multiplicity since it consists of leaves, shape, color, smell, and other features, is still one idea (reality) which is rose. It is this idea that grounds or serves as the profound essence of all the other characteristics that are embedded in a red rose. The Idea is therefore what unifies multiplicity to arrive at the essence of a thing. Multiplicity appears as the *difference*, the *other*, or better still all the features that make up a thing, which is not necessarily the essence of the thing. For multiplicity to arrive at unity, there has to be a *ground* that holds all the differences together. Besides, the presence of a ground implies that there is the *other* or *difference* that is grounded in it. The *ground* thus serves as *cause* whereas the *other* becomes the *effect*. It is in the apparition of the ground that philosophy begins, which implies that the one European philosophy serves as the cause for all other philosophies. The latter, according to Hegel, is merely the effects of the one European philosophy. The differences, contradictions or refutations that exist in philosophy are only determinations of one philosophy as the content or principle of philosophy remains the same. Thus, unity accounts for the multiplicity of philosophies, according to Hegel. This has led Nuzzo to affirm that "Hegel's history of philosophy, far from being the final assertion of a closed monism of reason, is constructed, from the very outset, to account for the pluralism of philosophies." (A. Nuzzo, in D. A. Duquette (ed.),

2003, p. 22). This is a misinterpretation of Hegel's argument as his history of philosophy is essentially an attempt to project European philosophy as the one true philosophy. Multiplicity is simply the way in which unity constructs itself in Hegel's history of philosophy. Hence, there is no opposition between unity and multiplicity as far as Hegel's history of philosophy is concerned. The refutation of one philosophy for another simply means setting aside one determination of philosophy and rendering it as subordinate to another. That which grounds philosophy, which is the Idea develops or expands from one generation to the next. Since the Idea serves as the universal unifying ground for Hegel, he argued that: "The expansion, as development, is not a dispersal and a falling apart but a holding together which is all the more powerful and intensive, the richer and wider the expansion of what is held together." (G. W. F. Hegel, 1985, p. 20). It follows that "the major task of philosophy for Hegel can be expressed as that of overcoming opposition." (C. Taylor, 1975, p. 76). This implies that the multiplicity of philosophies has to be reconciled to one true European philosophy since truth is one and eternal. Thus, Hegel found *one European origin* of philosophy that was fraudulently grounded in *one universal principle* from *one people*.

It is important to also note that Hegel's idea of philosophy's development is a complex systematic affair in which the end of history flows from its origin and history's origin is also known retrospectively from the point of view of the end. (A. Fiala, in D. A. Duquette (ed.), 2003, p. 53). Three things come to play in philosophy's development namely *potential*, *existence*, and *actual*. *Potential* refers to what is 'in itself' that has the capacity to rise to truth (G. W. F. Hegel, 1985, p. 72). For instance, the seed of a plant is potential since it has the capacity to grow to become a tree. Potential in development is simple, hidden and abstract yet contains all the elements that will later appear concretely as *existence*. The latter highlights how what is hidden in the potential state unfolds and manifests in reality. This is to say that what exists in a potential state usually grows to become a more complex and concrete phenomenon that exists or appears differently as compared to what it was in a potential state. Existence is indeed the formation of the individual parts that exist as a whole in a potential state. Multiple parts are thus characteristic of one existence. In the development of the idea, possibility or potentiality has to be transformed into existence. The *actual* stage of development means that both the potential and existence are identical. Since what exists in potential is the same thing that is revealed in existence, potential and existence are one and the same. Plurality or differences are thus seen in existence only because they are the manifestations of the different aspects of unity.

As is typical of Hegel's system, the next stage of development is of a higher value than the previous. For example, it is in actuality

that the seed comes to full term with itself, which is different from what it was in the potential state. What this means for the history of philosophy is that there is one truth that exists in a potential state. It is from this one truth that multiplicity or different philosophies develop. However, all these differences in philosophy are mere representations of the actuality of the one philosophy. With Hegel's understanding of development, multiplicity of philosophies or differences in philosophy needs to disappear to make way for one concrete philosophy, which must be European. The multiple forms of philosophies are judged to be arbitrary opinions that need to pave way for one European philosophy. Hegel argued that "the history of philosophy is not a collection of arbitrary opinions, but a necessary interconnection from its first beginnings to its rich development." (G. W. F. Hegel, 1985, p. 5). Opinions have no place in the beginning and the development of Hegel's philosophy. The level of actuality is much deeper than the other two. This implies that "development is precisely the spirit's self-deepening in such a way that it brings its depths into consciousness." (G. W. F. Hegel, 1985, p. 81). The next stage of development is always much concrete than the previous state. It follows that just as actuality is the highest of the three, existence is also higher than potential.

With this understanding of development, one can enter deeper into how Hegel constructs philosophy and its history. The history of philosophy, according to Hegel, is nothing other than the specification of philosophy as one. This implies that any other philosophy must fit, or at the very least be forced to meet the criteria set in the one philosophy as prescribed by Hegel. It is important to highlight the features that constitute the one philosophy. The first point to note is that the one philosophy is the labor of every century. The present state of philosophy is the fruit of the labor of preceding generations of philosophical engagements. The history of philosophy is thus not only the history of failures and successes of preceding generations, but also the history of acceptance and opposition of the thought of preceding and present philosophers (W. H. Walsh, 1965, p. 71). All the aspects of the life of the society including international relations, arts, civil life, domestic life, constitution, and morality must form part of the universal progression of the Idea or spirit. In essence, "philosophy is *one aspect* of the entire formation or manifestation of the spirit – it is the consciousness of the spirit and spirit's supreme flowering, since its endeavor is to know what spirit is." (G. W. F. Hegel, 1985, p. 111). The preceding form of philosophy in past generations serves as the cause for the present state of philosophy. Consequently, the earlier form of philosophy is abstract and less developed as compared to its present form. Hegel also argued that "the beginning is the most abstract because it is the beginning which has not yet moved forward; the final form proceeding from this development, as from a progression process of determining, is the most concrete."

(G. W. F. Hegel, 1985, pp. 47-48). Thus, if a person wants to find the profoundest or the most developed philosophy, (s)he must focus more on the most recent European philosophy. Apart from its historical beginning, every philosopher must also endeavor to pursue another philosophical beginning as Staehler has remarked that “the beginning of philosophy has to be carried out over and over again as *our own* beginning if we want to enter into philosophy for ourselves.” (T. Staehler, in D. A. Duquette (ed.), 2003, p. 110). In other words, one can be considered a philosopher if (s)he can initiate a new beginning to the history of philosophy through original thought. Hegel’s history of philosophy is thus a beginning in the sense that it tries to unite all the complexities of philosophy to one state. Additionally, it is important to highlight that “every philosophy, precisely because it is the exposition of one particular stage of development, belongs to its own time and is caught in that time’s restriction.” (G. W. F. Hegel, 1985, p. 49). For that reason, each philosophy is mandated to respond to the challenges of its own time. For Hegel, “each philosophy must have appeared of necessity at the time of its appearance.” (G. W. F. HEGEL, 1985, p. 93). Philosophy, in its unity, always appears at the right time meaning that its content is always identical with the spirit or the substantive life of its age.

To conclude this section, what is important to retain is the fact that Hegel carried out the task of European philosophy and its history on the basis of philosophy’s unification. The concept of development enabled him to carry out this task as it highlighted the one movement that unfolds in potentiality, existence and actuality. Development of the history of philosophy is thus the one movement of philosophy that actualizes itself from one people to another. As a European, a German, and a Christian, Hegel’s notion of development underlined the universal development of philosophy as one European-German-Christian philosophy that actualizes the potential and the existence of all philosophies. The next section elaborates on Hegel’s development of this one European philosophy.

2. Description of Hegel’s One Philosophy

Hegel highlighted the distinctive character of philosophy by distinguishing it from mere externalities. According to him, the one truth in European philosophy is not found in pictorial images such as the image of an artwork, religious objects or mythologies. The latter particularly serves as a *veil* that conceal truth. Hegel argued that mythologies are mere representations or appearances of truth. Furthermore, he understood pictorial thinking as a lower mode of thinking that needs to be transcended for philosophy to appear. This means that myths, pictures, and images must be discarded from philosophy as European philosophy must be an inner self-recollection in which thinking is its own object. Unlike pictorial objects that are mere representations of truth, European philosophy constitutes the

truth. Thinking of the ‘particular’ marks the first appearance of this philosophy in time where particular refers to sense-perceptions, instincts, inclinations, and acts of will, which is not considered as a proper form of thinking by Hegel (G. W. F. Hegel, 1985, p. 89). In turn, thinking of the ‘universal’ marks the highest development of thought where philosophy really begins. For Hegel, this philosophy is essentially a system, which alludes to a totality that begins from what is simplest to arrive at what is more concrete. Perhaps the most important point to note about how Hegel perceived philosophy is that it has the sole aim of knowing God. This means that philosophy shares certain things in common with other disciplines notably religion, which also has God as its object. Hegel argued that “religion has the absolute Being as its object, and philosophy likewise seeks to *know* this Being [or essence].” (G. W. F. Hegel, 1985, p. 136). Nevertheless philosophy is unique in the sense that its history is itself the fully matured system of science in development (K. Thompson, in D. A. Duquette (ed.), 2003, p. 69). The categories of thought, concept, and the Idea are important to highlight in this discussion. Thought is the objective or subjective product of thinking. It is objective when it is universal and consists of only *form* and subjective when it is particular comprising *content*. In turn, concept refers to the concrete nature of thought. It is that which is determining and self-determining of thought. Thought remains an abstraction until it particularizes itself in the concept. One can therefore have a concept of a thing by virtue of thought. Furthermore, Idea is the synthesis of thought and concept. Just as thought concretizes itself in the concept, Idea is the concept filled with content. In essence, Idea is what is filled with itself, which Hegel refers to as Truth (G. W. F. Hegel, 1985, p. 69). While, the full determination of philosophy passes through the stages of thought, concept, and Idea, the full self-determination of philosophy manifests itself in Idea. The latter manifests itself in the process of development.

The uniqueness of philosophy as the full development of Idea compelled Hegel to eliminate other disciplines from his understanding of philosophy. The first has to do with the empirical sciences that rely on observation, experimentation, and reasoning. Hegel argued that what these sciences *formerly* have in common with philosophy is thinking since they strive for universal principles or essential grounds. Secondly, religion shares *substance* or *content* which is the Absolute, the Spirit, or God with philosophy. However, since religion relies on authority (religious authority) that gives its content and the empirical sciences rely exclusively on experimentation and perception in order to arrive at universal principles, both cannot be regarded as philosophy. This is because the principle of philosophy consists of “what *I* have acquired through *my* senses, my inner feeling, i.e. through experience and what for this reason alone counts as true for me.” (G. W. F. Hegel, 1985, p. 117). In this vein, philosophy is

subjective and consists of the consciousness of the individual that has to engage in the activity of pure thinking by *not* relying on dogmas from religious authority or nature and experience from scientific 'authority.' Hegel further observes that even though philosophy and religion have God as the content of knowing, whereas religion arrives at knowing God through devotion and cult (feeling), philosophy tends to know God through pure thinking. Additionally, Hegel discards *popular philosophy* or *popular wisdom* from philosophy. It is worth noting here that Hegel is in discussion with Kant as far as popular wisdom is concerned. According to him, popular philosophy tends to mix human affairs and spiritual topics. By citing the writings of Cicero and Pascal, Hegel put popular ethicists, mystics and dreamers under the category of popular philosophy. He excluded popular wisdom from philosophy because the source of content and form of popular philosophy is identical to science and religion. The content of popular philosophy "consists of the laws of the land and the doctrines of religion." (G. W. F. Hegel, 1985, p. 163). By radicalizing the position of Kant, Hegel maintained that popular wisdom cannot form any part of philosophy.

The one truth of philosophy must essentially be secular or mundane knowledge, according to Hegel. He highlighted that it is by virtue of philosophy that the Divine becomes present in the world. In other words, it is the activity of thinking that enables thought to arrive at comprehending God. Thus, the only authentic way to arrive at divinity, according to him, is through human thinking as neither nature nor other animals nor other material things can grant this access (G. W. F. Hegel, 1985, p. 128). But how does thinking, which makes the Divine present in the world progress? Hegel argued that "in almost all peoples, philosophy only appears when public life no longer gives satisfaction and ceases to engross the popular interest, when the citizen can no longer take any part in government." (G. W. F. Hegel, 1985, p. 114). This usually happens at a moment of crisis that leads to the withdrawal or distancing of philosophers from public or external life in order to be at home with thinking. Thus, the moments of crisis or tension in a society serves as the starting point to philosophize for Hegel. This must develop towards thinking of the Absolute in its universal dimension inasmuch as the Absolute is the essence of philosophy. Philosophy progresses when the Absolute enters into consciousness through thinking. This latter sets the human being aside from other creatures.

All the other dimensions of the human person such as religion, science, arts, etc. exist simply because of the thinking capacity of the human person. Thinking is the actuality that unifies the potential and the existence of the human person. Thus, the ultimate purpose of the development of the human being is to think as "all men are rational, and the formal side of this rationality is that man is free; this

is his nature, inherent in the essence of man.” (G. W. F. Hegel, 1985, p. 75). Freedom is thus the *form* of rationality whereas rationality is the *content* of freedom. Rationality has to manifest itself in freedom and vice versa. The development of philosophy, according to Hegel, implies the presence of freedom in human beings. What constituted the principle of freedom for Hegel can be found in the political constitution, the legislature, and the history of a people. In particular, he ties freedom to political institutions as he argued that it is when free political institutions appear in history that the one truth of philosophy begins (G. W. F. Hegel, 1985, p. 167). According to Hegel, this one beginning of European philosophy appeared in Greece. This also means that it was in Greece that human beings first arrived at a consciousness of freedom. Accordingly, this German philosopher argued that: “Philosophy proper starts in the West. There the spirit plumbs its own depths, is immersed in itself; there it establishes itself as free, is free in its own eyes.” (G. W. F. Hegel, 1985, p. 171). The development of Greek philosophy, according to Hegel, ends with the Neo-Platonists and then the business of philosophy passes into the hands of the European world. Hegel perceived the Christian Germanic world, Europe, as having the responsibility to carry on the task of philosophy which, according to him, the ancient Greeks had begun.

In the East, Hegel argued that there was no freedom and also claimed that the sources for studying Eastern philosophy are recent. He highlighted that what dominated in the East is *substance*, which made it impossible for him to find philosophy over there. According to him, “political freedom, law, free ethical life, pure consciousness, thinking – all these are absent” (G. W. F. Hegel, 1985, p. 171). in the East. The condition of existence in the East, according to him, is one that was characterized by the status of lord and of servant as he claimed that: “In the East only one man, the despot, is free; in Greece, some are free; but in Germanic life all are free, i.e. man as man is free.” (G. W. F. Hegel, 1985, p. 173). Consequently, philosophy was incapable of beginning in the East as Hegel perceived no freedom over there. Additionally, the form and content of Oriental philosophy, according to him, was filled with religious thought. By kicking religion, myth, and popular wisdom out of philosophy, Hegel sought to eliminate Eastern religious texts from the unity of philosophy. What made Eastern religion more problematic for Hegel is that he perceived fear or unfreedom as its main character. According to him, not only have Eastern peoples personified and worshipped natural powers and forces, but that the fear of natural powers and forces characterized Eastern religions. Furthermore, he argued that abstraction was dominant in Eastern religions. Hegel finds the extreme nature of abstraction among the Indians as he highlighted the extreme forms of penances, mortifications, and self-inflicting pains that were carried out by them (G. W. F. Hegel, 1985, p. 170).

Thus, there are only two periods in which Hegel's one truth of European philosophy appears namely Greek philosophy and European philosophy. These two periods went through three phases: the first phase is Greek philosophy that lasts for a period of thousand years – from Thales to Neo-Platonic philosophies in the Christendom; the second phase consists of the Scholastics, Arabic, Jewish, and the Christian philosophies of the Middle Ages that also lasts for a period of thousand years; and the last period begins with Bacon that stretches to Hegel in the Modern Ages. The full development of philosophy, according to Hegel, is in direct relation to Christianity. For Hegel, it is in Christianity that the full expression of freedom takes effect in Europe as he claimed that the Christian religion initiated the doctrine that all people are free through Christ. He argued that the Christian religion does not only make human beings equal before God, it also liberates all to Christian freedom (G. W. F. Hegel, 1985, p. 75). Hegel also saw the Protestant movement as paving the way for people to freely exercise the act of thinking since individuals of that movement distanced themselves from mere ecclesiastical traditions and doctrines to arrive at self-consciousness of truth in thinking. The principle of the Christian world, according to Hegel, is the absolute self-awareness of freedom in which man as man has infinite worth. Even though freedom is implied in the lives of all people, it is only the European who has knowledge of himself as free, according to this German philosopher as he stated that: "I am free implicitly, but now I am also free explicitly, and I *am* only so far as I exist in freedom." (G. W. F. Hegel, 1985, p. 76). In Hegel's Europe therefore, "everyone knows that he cannot be a slave; he knows this as his essential being." (G. W. F. Hegel, 1985, p. 172). Slavery is against the consciousness of the European, according to Hegel. It follows that in the development of the European, freedom is the actuality that grounds the multiple characteristics of his existence such as name, age, and height. Thus, freedom for Hegel finally consists of the conscious unchanging or eternal actuality that unifies the potential and the existence of the European distinguishing him from other human beings. The peak moment of the unity of Hegel's history of philosophy is to know the truth of the Christian God.

To summarize Hegel's history of philosophy, development has been presented as the one progression of philosophy which begins in Greece and attains its maturity in Christian Europe. By seeking to rely exclusively on Western tradition to determine the character of philosophy, Hegel falls short of presenting an accurate account of a universal history of philosophy. In what follows, the article seeks to highlight some points of concern in Hegel's account of unity in the plurality of philosophies as Hegel's conception of unity largely discards historicity and plurality of philosophies.

3. Points for Consideration

Hegel's history of philosophy does not deal solely with the past but the present as he argued that philosophies that came before him were simple, abstract, and general. He highlighted that: "We cannot be completely satisfied with an older philosophy; however excellent it may be." (G. W. F. Hegel, 1985, p. 107). In this vein, Hegel provides room for future philosophers to assess the several flaws in his account of unity in the plurality of philosophies. His principal approach is to think of a model of development that accounts for one truth of philosophy that gradually progresses from one people to another. The following points put the central arguments of Hegel into perspective, pointing out key factors that call for the need to go beyond Hegel's restrictive perception of philosophy and its history.

First, Hegel's solution to the problem of multiplicity of philosophies is restrictive. Beiser has argued that Hegel's history of philosophy "*historicizes* philosophy, explaining its purpose, principles, and problems in historical terms." (F. C. Beiser, 1993, p. 273). Historicizing philosophy implies that the traditional concepts of metaphysics such as God, nature, and immortality can only be explained in historical terms. It also means that if the social composition to which philosophy belongs undergoes changes, then philosophy also needs to undergo such changes in order for it to be responsive to the needs of the time. Thus, it is impossible to detach history from philosophy as far as Hegel is concerned as he has been regarded as the first great philosopher to perceive an inseparable link between history and philosophy (T. Rockmore, 1993, p. 47). From this point of view, philosophical doctrines ought to distance themselves from eternal principles. However, the question concerning how to maintain one immutable truth in the history of philosophy given that the chain of events of history and philosophy change from one generation to another was not resolved by Hegel. In other words, how is it possible for Hegel to maintain the position that one eternal truth unifies all philosophies even though the historical reality from which philosophy springs forth vary from one epoch to another and from one people to another? Thus, he fails to sufficiently understand the history of philosophy as history of differences and contradictions. His argument that all different philosophies are aspects of one truth is misleading as it is better to think of pluralism of philosophies without attempting to unify them with a European viewpoint. Pluralism of philosophies implies that philosophies differ across space and time. It is the consequence of a spacio-temporal development conditioned by the various aspects of the life of a society including culture, economics, and politics. Hegel's understanding of unity largely undermines the authenticity of his own philosophical system. It is highly problematic to keep one eternal truth of philosophy as Hegel suggests because the notion of eternity, at least from the perspective

of historical beings, does not make sense in historical terms. This misled the German philosopher to present European philosophy as universal philosophy. There cannot be any history of philosophy if what has to be accounted for is eternity. The latter cannot have a history simply because it does not encounter something different. History can genuinely account for the differences of philosophy; not one philosophy. Hegel was able to study the history of philosophy through the differences that he perceived from Greek philosophy to European philosophy.

The article argues that plurality in multiple philosophies makes more sense than Hegel's perception of unity in multiple philosophies. Plurality in multiple philosophies does not mean that the definition of philosophy gets lost in plural forms and that it is impossible for philosophers of different backgrounds to identify themselves as philosophers and to understand each other. It does not also mean that truth has to be relativized. What it does mean is that there cannot be one individual or one group of people that must impose one universal character and task of philosophy to all of humanity. As I will elaborate below, Hegel's notion of one truth of philosophy imposes the Christian God as the ultimate universal task of philosophy; a position that is untenable. Plurality in multiple philosophies has to do with acknowledging that, given the realities of different human societies, of different circumstances and of different conditions of the human being, philosophy develops differently and assumes different tasks in different contexts. For instance, circumstances that have led to debates in Contemporary African philosophy differ from those that have led to debates in Contemporary European philosophy. Contemporary African philosophy has developed within a unique context of a people who have suffered from the ordeals of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and colonization. It follows that the debates in African philosophy are not necessarily the same as those in European philosophy. Just as the task of European philosophy makes sense within the context of Europe, African philosophy and other philosophies make sense within their geographical and historical contexts. Each period in the history of thinking is bound to account for different realities at different epochs for different categories of people. As far as the concept of plurality in multiple philosophies is concerned, Karl Jaspers' book: *Origin and Goal of History* has endeavored to give a better illustration of diverse philosophies than Hegel. For example, Jaspers makes the effort to acknowledge plural identities of philosophy as he acknowledged the existence of Oriental philosophy. However, just like Hegel, Jaspers fails to admit the reality of philosophizing in tribal societies.

Furthermore, as far as the perception of one Western beginning of philosophy is concerned, Walsh has remarked that Hegel does very little in his justification of either intellectual or social

non-philosophical background to philosophical movements (W. H. Walsh, 1965, p. 75). Multiple origins of philosophy is rejected by Hegel because he appears to think of humankind as a spiritual unit; to a certain extent as one subject whose thinking has only one origin. Hegel's concern is to refute an origin that is earlier than Greek philosophy while neglecting the reality of multiple origins. Schlegel, Hegel's main opponent, takes India to be the origin of philosophy. In recent years, it has become clear that ancient Greek philosophy was largely based on ancient Egyptian thought as Cheikh Anta Diop, for example, has argued that:

For us, the return to Egypt in all domains is the necessary condition for reconciling African civilizations with history, in order to be able to construct a body of modern human sciences, in order to renovate African culture. Far from being a reveling in the past, a look toward the Egypt of antiquity is the best way to conceive and build our cultural future. In reconceived and renewed African culture, Egypt will play the same role that Greco-Latin antiquity plays in Western culture. (C. A. Diop, 1991, p. 3).

Unlike Hegel, Diop indirectly admits multiple origins of philosophy as the return to ancient Egypt which Diop proposes relates only to African philosophy. It is clear from the above quote that Diop respects the need for Western philosophy to trace its origin to ancient Greece. A plural origin in the account of the history of philosophy means that philosophy has also emerged from other places including Asia and America. Thales may have begun the history of Western philosophy, but that does not mean that he began philosophy for non-Western countries. People have referred to philosophy using different names, but its essential character is the activity of thinking. Fiala has remarked that: "We wonder whether there is a moment in time at which events in time begin to be reflected upon, i.e., whether there is a moment in history at which the desire for truth arises and in which the history of philosophy begins." (A. Fiala, in D. A. Duquette (ed.), 2003, pp. 57-58). Thinking has been in existence since the foundation of human societies, which makes Hegel's narrow understanding of philosophy irrelevant for non-Western contexts. At every epoch, individuals and groups are bound to begin creative ways of philosophizing.

Additionally, Hegel's definition of philosophy is not fair to both the tradition of philosophy in the West and the possibility of philosophizing in the non-European world. His restriction of philosophy to speculative scientific development is unfair to both medieval philosophers and existential philosophers such as Pascal. Modern thinkers including Kierkegaard and Nietzsche have shown that the tension between a scientific/academic philosophy and an existential philosophy form part of the very existence of philosophy. The transition of philosophy as popular wisdom to philosophy as science is not as self-evident as Hegel thought. In modern times,

Dilthey appeared to be far more positive about the philosophical character of Medieval and Oriental philosophy than Hegel. Dilthey was conscious of the fact that “any attempt to force the vast field of the humanities into the strait-jacket of the so-called scientific method was doomed to failure” (G. Masur, 1952, p. 95). It is only when history adequately acknowledges the complexities of human societies as well as the intricacies of human thinking that philosophy becomes capable of acknowledging both scientific and non-scientific forms of thinking. In Dilthey’s way of thinking, according to Masur, the human person does not possess an absolute, eternal or immutable constitution. Instead, the human being assumes varied and diverse forms in history. The capacity to adapt to diverse forms in history empowers human thought to be at home with both scientific and non-scientific modes of philosophizing. In this vein, Dilthey describes the first epoch of civilization as being marked by the priestly philosophy of the Oriental world that is laid down in the doctrine of monotheism and unified with an ethico-religious procedure for the guidance of life (G. Masur, 1952, p. 98). Dilthey’s acknowledgement of the priestly philosophy of the Oriental world affirms his positive attitude and openness to varied forms of thinking that surpass that of Hegel. Thus, it is important to broaden Hegel’s restriction of the history of philosophy to a speculative scientific development by including non-scientific development of human thought as well.

The intrinsic link that Hegel establishes between Christianity and philosophy is also problematic. In the final analysis, he reunites what he initially separates in his definition of philosophy including religion and philosophy. For him, true philosophy is only possible within a Christian context. Of course, Hegel makes a distinction between form and content for philosophy and religion. The uniqueness of philosophy, according to him, lies in its form as free and autonomous thinking. However, Hegel ultimately unites the form of philosophy with its content, which is the Absolute understood as the Christian God. Some theologians and philosophers have highlighted that Hegel ends up reducing Christianity to an embodiment of philosophical positions and philosophy to a personification of religious positions. Hegel was Eurocentric particularly in the attempt to impose one Christian philosophy, which is protestant. The unity of Hegel’s philosophy and its history lead to the Christian God since for him, it is in Christianity that the human being attains the fullness of freedom thereby making the Christian God the task of philosophy. Considering the multiplicity of religions that there are as well as the existence of atheistic thinkers, it is impossible to hold on to Hegel’s prescription of a universal Christian philosophy. A universal history of philosophy must account for the truths of plurality of Gods (religious) and indeed no truth of Gods (atheists). In other words, Hegel’s conception of the essence of the human person as free fails to adequately integrate non-Christian forms of thinking.

In turn, Hegel's model of development is too one-sided as, for example, it views humanity as a unit consisting of different people who must adopt European ways of thinking. This model of development is such that non-Europeans get a fixed place within a universal development that moves from one people (East) to another (West). Also, the task of European philosophy has a beginning in Greece and then passes into the hands of the Christian-European people. Thus, Hegel fails to appreciate the fact that there are fully developed philosophies within each group of people. Such a model of development presupposes that there must always be a primitive beginning of philosophy elsewhere that must attain its maturation in Europe. The Asians and Greeks occupy the primitive level in Hegel's history of philosophy and Africans are cut off completely in Hegel's *Philosophy of World History*. Hegel thus earns the status of a racist with this model of development.

Another concern that arises from the analysis relates to Hegel's idea of freedom in the West and its relation to philosophy. For him, philosophy can only exist where there is consciousness of freedom. This consciousness, according to Hegel, attains its peak in the West. Perceiving the Christian West as where there is a universal consciousness of freedom is really misleading. This German philosopher tries as much as possible to absolve the European slave traders from blame in the history of philosophy even though he condemns slavery. The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and colonization of African countries do not express the full consciousness of freedom for both Africans and Europeans. In other words, it is impossible to arrive at a universal consciousness of freedom in any society that is either being colonized or is profiting from the proceeds of colonization and slave trade. The strange thing is that Hegel only points to the Oriental world as where slavery was present in the history of philosophy which for him makes it impossible for the emergence of philosophy in the East. The concept of universal consciousness of freedom attains a higher status in post-colonial times as it made more sense when Europeans agreed to abolish slave trade and to allow people in colonized territories to run their own systems of governance. Given the atrocities committed by Europeans during the period of slave trade and colonization, it was unreasonable for Hegel to argue that Europe had attained a full consciousness of freedom. Neo-colonialism and other social ills such as racism also make it difficult to think that Europe and the West have attained a full consciousness of freedom.

It is also important to highlight the inaccuracies in Hegel's idea that it was impossible to philosophize in 'unfreedom' conditions. Just as the principle of 'some are free' in ancient Greece did not prevent philosophy from being pursued by ancient Greek philosophers, the absence of full consciousness of freedom through slave trade and colonization has not prevented the West from philosophizing. Hegel's

remark that “in almost all peoples, philosophy only appears when public life no longer gives satisfaction and ceases to engross the popular interest, when the citizen can no longer take any part in government” (G. W. F. Hegel, 1985, p. 114). shows that philosophy thrives as well when there is restriction of freedom. The latter is not absolute as most societies face one crisis or another at every point in time. Hegel’s strong link between philosophy and political institutions is problematic as philosophy is not solely dependent on political institutions. Depending on freedom from political institutions to pursue the task of philosophy is identical to relying on religious or scientific authority, which Hegel rejects from the character of philosophy. Political institutions themselves are also forms of pictorial images or externalities that lie outside of the activity of thinking. Inasmuch as such institutions can promote philosophy, they do not provide the only means for the pursuit of thinking. Additionally, the link between philosophy and religion in Hegel’s thought is unclear. In one breadth, he argued that there was no philosophy in the East because for him philosophy there existed under the influence of an oriental religion that was marked by fear/unfreedom. Yet, he glorified the Protestant Church’s influence on Western philosophy without underscoring the oppressive character of the church as an institution. For example, the Church’s understanding of freedom did not apply to the Africans that were trapped in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade 9 (W. Rodney, 1976). In general, the link between philosophy and religion does not negate the philosophical character of Eastern and other forms of thinking. In this vein, Jaspers, for example, has highlighted the philosophical character of Indian religious thought as he acknowledged that it is possible to philosophize in politically unfree conditions. While denying that political freedom is a precondition to humanity’s attainment of great heights, Jaspers argued that:

High spiritual vitality, creativity and a profound psychic life were also possible in political unfreedom. We who regard freedom as desirable, for whom political freedom can never again be divorced from the idea of humanity, see the historical question of whether something like political freedom, having its source in the West, will or will not become a reality for the education of the whole of mankind (K. Jaspers, 1953, p. 170).

It follows that Western freedom cannot be the only precondition in which philosophy thrives. Even in the so-called ‘unfree’ societies, philosophy has progressed to maturity. The history of philosophy cannot be reduced to Hegel’s understanding of ‘free’ societies as great thoughts preceded Western philosophy.

CONCLUSION: USEFULNESS AND LIMITATIONS OF HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY

In the light of the concerns addressed in the last section, it appears as though Hegel did not make any meaningful contribution to the history of philosophy. This is untrue! The question that emerges then is: what lessons can be drawn from Hegel's history of philosophy? One contribution of Hegel to the history of philosophy lies in his effort to reconcile philosophy with history. His insistence on discussing philosophy and the history of philosophy as a collective is still vital today. In order for a person to be a part of philosophical debates, (s)he must be aware of the views of preceding philosophers, especially when it comes to philosophical topics that have already been debated by past philosophers. Learning about the views of preceding philosophers already situates a person in the field of philosophy in which (s)he has to initiate another beginning or innovative ideas through thinking. Even though philosophy and the history of philosophy remain inseparable, philosophy comes before the history of philosophy simply because philosophy has to exist in order for its history to take course. From Hegel's philosophy, thought becomes essentially historical. This means that it is impossible to separate the object of thought from the activity of thinking about it. As historical beings, philosophers must engage philosophical debates on historical grounds. Moreover, when we place Hegel's efforts in its own historical context, we see that it is a position within a debate on the origins of philosophy. Such debates have been gaining grounds among philosophers in other places including Africa and Asia. The existence and nature of both Oriental and African philosophies and their origins are still being vigorously pursued. The tension or crisis within local cultures that comes with the introduction of modern sciences, technology, industry as well as the scientific development of philosophy have impacted such debates. The discussions on the philosophical relevance of myth, folk wisdom, and traditional religions in the contemporary world are still important today. For example, in African philosophy, opinions are still divided with respect to the importance of proverbs, myths and ancestral wisdom to philosophy. Furthermore, the relevance of religion in philosophy has been an important discussion for African philosophers as an emphasis has been placed on religion in philosophical discussions. Major African thinkers including Mbiti, Gyekye, Beyers, Kamara, and Owiredu have largely resorted to religion in their definitions of reality in Africa. Religion is easily equated to reality and vice versa in African thought.

Another important contribution of Hegel's history of philosophy lies in the fact that it creates room for critique. Since he argued that older philosophers fail to respond adequately to the needs of the present, this implies that current philosophers must

seek to correct the inconsistencies in older philosophies based on the insights from new realities. Thus, one advantage of the development model that Hegel proposed has to do with the constant quest for present philosophers to improve on earlier philosophies. The idea that one Western account of the history of philosophy must be taken as a universal account is certainly untenable. Hegel's concept of freedom cannot be applied everywhere even in Europe. In place of Hegel's one 'universal' European philosophy, it makes more sense to think of plural forms of philosophy, an option which Hegel fails to adequately explore. Multiple forms and origins of philosophy sets us on the path to go beyond the following weaknesses in Hegel's history of philosophy: the misguided move to reject Oriental philosophy; the inability to separate philosophy from Christianity; the one-sided model of development that fails to consider the possibility of a full development of philosophy within one group of people; the exaggeration of the concept of Western freedom; and the inability to admit the possibility of philosophizing in 'unfree' societies.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ◆ BEISER Frederick Charles (ed.), 1993, *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- ◆ DUQUETTE David A. (ed.), 2003, *Hegel's History of Philosophy: New Interpretations*, New York: State of University of New York Press.
- ◆ DIOP Cheikh Anta, 1991, *Civilization or Barbarism: an Authentic Anthropology*, translated in English by Ngemi, Y.-L. M., Brooklyn: Lawrence Hill Books.
- ◆ HEGEL Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, 1985, *Introduction to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, translated in English by KNOX, T. M. and MILLER, A. V., New York: Oxford University Press.
- ◆ JASPERS Karl, 1953, *Origin and Goal of History*, translated in English by Bullock, M., New Haven: Yale University Press.
- ◆ Masur Gerhard, 1952, "Wilhelm Dilthey and the History of Ideas," in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, Vol. 13, No. 1.
- ◆ ROCKMORE Tom, 1976, *Before and After Hegel: A Historical Introduction to Hegel's Thought*, California: University of California Press, 1993. Rodney, W., *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*, London: Bogle-L'Overture Publications.
- ◆ TAYLOR Charles, 1975, *Hegel*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- ◆ WALSH William Henry, 1965, "Hegel on the history of philosophy," in *Beiheft 5, The Historiography of the History of Philosophy*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing.

Une vie de griot

Sommeil tu t'en vas,
Tu t'en vas loin de moi,
D'un pas léger, furtif;
Après une nuit d'oubli
Au pays de nulle part.

Semblable à un mâle félin,
Pour toute prière, au réveil
Je m'étire longuement,
Et plie ma natte de fortune
À l'épaisseur minimale.
À la belle étoile j'ai dormi
Sans crainte, ni joie
Sans couverture ni draps...
Loin, bien loin de toute bête,
De tout homme.
N'ayant point de toit,
Quel qu'endroit qui m'échoit,
Fait largement ma fortune.

Moi, griot vagabond.
Moi griot sans fardeau,
Libre de toute contrainte
Seyant ordinairement
À l'homme d'âge mûr.
Je me fais vent
Quand nature vente,
Pluie lorsque pleut l'ondée,
Dur rocher en temps de crise,
Sur lequel vient
Se reposer l'âme en peine.

Je sais tout le merveilleux
De la littérature orale:
Épopées, chansons, contes, légendes...
Comme gouttes d'eau
Dans le grand fleuve.
Je sais l'Afrique profonde
Jusqu'au vertige.
Venez filles et fils du continent,
Il n'est royaume, roi ou reine,
Artisan de talent, prince glorieux,
Que je ne connaisse.
Ma mémoire est univers,
Ma parole sagesse,
Mon chant festin,
Ma danse rituel,
Mes récits plénitude...
Avec lesquels la génération nouvelle
Tisse sur l'horizon vierge,
Une Afrique riche de son patrimoine.

Albert Aoussine, « Une vie de griot »,
Albert Aoussine & Josette Neisius,
Alchimie Poétique, 2016, pp. 120-121.

