FREEDOM IN MODERN PHILOSOPHY AND AFRICAN PREDICAMENT

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Introduction
The aim of this paper is to examine the different conceptions of freedom in modern philosophy and in African philosophy and then an articulation of what African freedom means. Freedom in modern philosophy is hereby related to the question of African philosophy. The concept of ‘Freedom’ itself is a nebulous concept. It has often been discussed and written about as an abstract concept, and in some other circumstances, it is viewed as a socio-political praxis. An adequate analysis and understanding of the question of African freedom demands an analysis of the concept from the vantage point of modern philosophy.

Freedom and determinism are contrary concepts in philosophy and science and, none could be adequately understood without first deciphering the other. So, the discussion of the concept, ‘freedom’ in philosophy and science goes hand in hand with the discussion of causality or determinism. Everything that occurs or exists does not so in space and time or spatio-temporal reality. Consequently we are concerned with whether there are causal relations or non-causal relations and pre-occupation of philosophers of science, social sciences and history. If determinism is true, then there will be no room for human freedom or African freedom in socio-political sense. “Determinism is the view that everything that happens is determined”.¹ “Freedom is possible only to the extent that determinism is true”² We may not be talking of freedom if there were no somewhat deterministic influences.

An understanding of freedom is not only a lee-way to scientific advances, but also a way of understanding the limits and powers of man. It has accordingly assumed a wider socio-political dimensions, precisely because man is a social animal who wants not only to be free but also wants to assert himself and determine his future. It is not accidental, therefore, that ‘freedom’ has assumed cultic dimensions. Mortimer Adler therefore says in his book, Freedom that
the demand for freedom has been the tocsin and storm signal of political upheaval but also, in another phase, the watch-word of peace and conservation. It has been the battle cry of revolutionists and counter-revolutionists, of reformers and reactionaries, of authoritarians and anarchists, of utopia and men who fear all forms of enthusiasm.\textsuperscript{3}

In today's world, in geopolitics, in intra-politics in different nations and in tribal and family units, people are divided as a result of conflicting conceptions of freedom.

**Laissez Faire and Moral Conceptions of Freedom**

Freedom in political and social practices is often construed more as liberty, which means 'doing as one wishes' or "doing what one ought".\textsuperscript{4} There can be two subcontrary conceptions in educational policy or penal reform. One of these conceptions, that is, precisely the *laissez-faire* conception, holds the opinion that one should have the freedom to assert oneself in specific areas like religion, education and so on. Analogous to this line of reasoning is the pursuit of freedom to the point of reckless exercise of power to the detriment of others. The seed of this conception was sowed in the ancient Greek period by the minority thinkers like the sophists, but germinated and flowered with wider acceptance in the modern philosophical era of Hobbes and Darwin. The other conception, otherwise known as the moral conception which was the majority's pre-occupation of the ancient Greek philosophy, says that there is no absolute freedom, and that freedom has to be in tune with the dictates and demands of the society, community or the state. The conception demands limits to the exercise of religious and educational freedom, and as well as what one can do socially or politically. For this school of thought freedom does not lie in pursuing individual interests based on personal idiosyncrasies nor in running away from societal demands and expectations, but in learning with fuller experience what is construed to be good. The basis of *laissez-faire* conception is articulated and couched in Western socio-economic philosophy which maintains that "freedom flourishes if only external circumstance favour the consummation of desire, and is destroyed by counteracting circumstances"\textsuperscript{5}, whereas for the moral conception outword circumstances though important in other respects, are irrelevant to freedom. It has been argued that in the field of education *laissez-faire* "insists on spontaneity and growth, and urges that curricula follow the bent of the pupil's awakening interests, whereas moral freedom entails discipline along the high road of religion, morals, science, or classical learning."\textsuperscript{6} While the former would