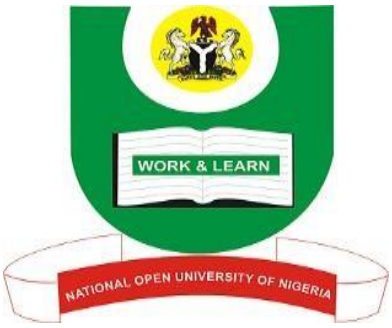

Course Code: PHL 323

Course Title: Philosophy of Arts and Literature

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COURSE GUIDE

PHL323: Philosophy of Arts and Literature

NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA (NOUN)

2023

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

It is a privilege to welcome you to the course Philosophy of Arts and Literature, PHL323. This is a course that will expose learners to some of the basic ideas of aesthetics aside the meaning nature of aesthetics itself. This Course, Philosophy of Arts and Literature, even when it concerns with some of the thematic considerations in aesthetics will not be limited to the assessment of theories such as instrumentalism, emotiovism, formalism, autonomy in the study of artworks. It goes beyond mere theoretical expositions by admitting into its fold, some practical illustrations to which learners can easily relate with. Some of the important or particular illustrations which will be encountered in this Course concerns with some of the philosophical and socio-political implications of colours like "white" and "black" for categorizing and symbolizing humans. This distinction or categorization will be made evident in works like William Shakespeare's *Othello* and some other classical literature. As a way illustrating how artworks have the capacity of social change and advocacy for non-violence, the popular novel of George Orwell, *Animal Farm,* is used. Ways through which artworks like music can birth social change and consciousness is illustrated with Fela Anikulapo's "blackism."

This new approach is line with the recognition that Aesthetics has not really gained attention in philosophy scholarship even when there is abundance of materials that can make learning very interesting. Hence, this Course will first provide the students with some of the important aesthetic theories and theorists in module 1 before using module 2 and 3 for exploring the aesthetic significance of artworks both in performance and written forms.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The overriding objectives of this Course are listed below:

1. To deepen the comprehension concerning the nature and task of philosophy;
2. Identify at least two philosophical tools employed by philosophy to interrogate other disciplines;
3. To critically evaluate the social and philosophical significance of artworks both in

performance, oral and documented forms;

4. To identify and evaluate at least three aesthetic theories;
5. To attain a comprehensive and practical understanding of the metaphysical significance of artworks;
6. To evaluate the various ways through which the concepts of colours such a "white" and "black" have historical usage and significance; and
7. To be able to make a formal distinction between philosophy of literature and literature in philosophy.

WORKING THROUGH THIS COURSE

For an adequate understanding of the contents of this course, students are encouraged to possess a copy of the course guide which outlines what is expected of them. It will guide students to read through the study text in a coherent and logical manner and thereby enhance their understanding of the fundamental ideas expressed in each of the thematic considerations included in the modules of this course.

In addition to the above, students are required to be actively involved in forum discussion and facilitation. Hence, attendance plus class participation are very important. There are also interesting readings that are necessary to enhance understanding of the course. Lecture notes are mere guidelines.

Furthermore, students are encouraged to develop novel thoughts and reflections on how the tools and methods of philosophy have implications for a deeper understanding of history by consulting other relevant texts beyond the course guide and notes given to them.

STUDY UNITS

There course material on PHL323 boasts of a total of 12 units distributed through three modules. A breakdown of the units in each module is indicated below:

Module 1: Reflecting on Nature of Philosophy of Other Disciplines

Unit 1: A Brief Revision on the Notion of Philosophy

Unit 2: The Tools of Philosophy

Unit 3: Philosophy and Other Disciplines

Unit 4: Aesthetics as a Branch of Philosophy

Unit 5: Aesthetic Theories on Artworks

Module 2: The Theory of Instrumentalism and African Works of Art

Unit 1: Autonomy, Quasi-Realism and Aesthetic Judgment

Unit 2: Instrumentalism and African Art

Unit 3: Two Indigenous African Artworks and Instrumentalism

Unit 4: Music as a weapon of social change: A Study of Fela Anikulapo's "Blackism"

Module 3: Philosophy and Literature

Unit 1: On Philosophy of Literature

Unit 2: Truth and Fiction in Literature: A Case Study of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*

Unit 3: Racism in Classical Literature

PRESENTATION SCHEDULE

This course has two presentations: one at the middle of the semester and the other towards the end of the semester. Before presentations, the facilitator would have established the rudiments of the course with the students. At the beginning of the semester, each student taking this course will be assigned a topic by the course facilitator. This will be made available in due time, for individual presentations during forum discussions. Each presenter has 15 minutes (10 minutes for presentation and 5 minutes for questions and answer). Besides, students will be divided by the course facilitator into groups and each group will be expected to submit a to be agreed topic for presentation to the facilitator via the recommended medium. Both attract 5% of total marks.

ASSESSMENT

In addition to the discussion forum presentations, two other papers are required in this course. Each paper should not exceed 2,500 words (excluding references and should be typewritten in 12 fonts, 1.5 spacing, and Times New Roman. The preferred reference style is APA 6th edition (you can download the format online). The topics will be made available in due time. Each carries 10% of the total marks.

Students should use the followings links to check their papers for plagiarism before submission:

- http://plagiarism.org
- http://www.library.arizona.edu/help/tutorials/plagiarism/index.html

If any student is unable to subject any paper to the plagiarism test, the course facilitator will do this after retrieving the electronic format from their student. Similarity index for submitted works by student must NOT EXCEED 35%. Finally, all students taking this course MUST take the final exam which attracts 70% of the total marks.

FOR OPTIMAL PERFORMANCE IN THIS COURSE

For students to perform optimally in this course, s/he must:

- Have 75% of attendance through active participation in both forum discussions and facilitation;
- Read each topic in the course materials before it is treated in class;
- Submit every assignment as and when due; failure to do so will attract penalties;
- Know that regular discussion and sharing of ideas among peers will enhance understanding the contents of the course;
- Download videos, podcasts and summary of group discussions for personal use;
- Attempt each self-assessment exercise in the main course material;
- Take the final exam; and

- Approach the course facilitator when there is a challenge with any aspect of the course.

FACILITATION

This course operates a learner-centred online facilitation. To support the student's learning process, the course facilitator will introduce each topic for discussion before, opening the floor for discussion. Each student is expected to read the course materials, as well as other related texts, and raise critical issues which s/he shall bring forth in the forum discussion for clarification. The facilitator will summarize forum discussion, provide relevant materials, videos and podcasts to the class; and disseminate all relevant information via email and SMS as might be required.

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In addition to the afore-stated works, the following online sites can also assist students to acquire additional publications:

- www.pdfdrive.net
- www.bookboon.com
- www.sparknotes.com
- http://ebookee.org
- https://scholar.google.com
- https://books.google.com

Module 1: Reflecting on Nature of Philosophy of Other Disciplines

Unit 1: A Brief Revision on the Notion of Philosophy
Unit 2: The Tools of Philosophy
Unit 3: Philosophy and Other Disciplines
Unit 4: Aesthetics as a Branch of Philosophy
Unit 5: Aesthetic Theories on Artworks

Unit 1: A Brief Revision on the Notion of Philosophy

1.1 Introduction

Dear students, there is no doubt that in this third year course you already too familiar with what philosophy means or stands for. In the present Course, it will not be taken for granted and hence a brief recapitulation over the central feature of philosophy will be undertaken. Relax and let us commence this, an interesting journey of how philosophy interacts with arts and literature.

1.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, learners should be able to:

1. Identify at least two meanings of philosophy and relate them to scholars
2. Evaluate the fundamental character of philosophy

1.3 Reconsidering the Fundamentality of Philosophy

As you already know by now, philosophy, as an academic discipline lacks univocal definition. However, this does not mean that efforts have not been made to evaluate the concept. It is an open secret that philosophy is derived from two Greek words: ‘philo’ and ‘sophia’ and both in English may interpreted as love and wisdom respectively. This implies that philosophy may stand for love for/of wisdom. Philosophy as we have been told has no universal definition. Hence various philosophers have given their various definitions to this effect. We shall

give some of these definitions in the hope of allowing us to understand some of the germane concerns of philosophy. Afterwards, we shall tell ourselves how this philosophy has given attention to the problem of how we know that things are as we claim to know them.

Bertrand Russell of blessed memory sees philosophy as the intermediary between religion and science. (1975:4) In a related development, *The New Webster's Dictionary of the English Language* explains that "philosophy is the love or pursuit of wisdom, i.e. the search for basic principles. Traditionally, Western philosophy comprises five branches of study: metaphysics, ethics, aesthetics, epistemology and logic" (Cayne;1992:755). It must be stated that Philosophy of Other Disciplines makes the branches of philosophy six. This latter branch of philosophy investigates the knowledge claims of other disciplines. Hence we have Philosophy of Biology, Philosophy of Physics, and Philosophy of Education, Philosophy of Law, Philosophy of Politics etc. It must be told at this point that Socio-Political Philosophy is one of the branches of philosophy that is most concerned with governing. However, a very central feature of the discipline is that it is anti-dogmatic. Most scholars often claim that philosophy is the base and apex of any endeavour of study. This is why regardless of whatever one has studied, the highest academic qualification one can have is the PhD – Doctor of Philosophy.

On the meaning and nature of philosophy, prominent African philosopher Professor J.I Omeregbe is of the view that "philosophy is essentially a reflective activity" (Omeregbe;1985:1). We agree with him because to philosophize is to reflect on any human experience, to search for answers to some fundamental questions that arise out of man's continuous curiosity. Philosophy is imbued in every man as it arises out of wonder. Based on this analysis, it will be foolhardy to agree with the West who categorized Miletian Thales as the father of philosophy, or what other authors have termed the first philosopher. But this claim is totally

wrong. By positing that Thales is the first philosopher, logically means that no one before him had done any reflective activity. We must recall that human experience is the source of the reflective activity known as philosophy as Professor Joseph Omeregbe (1985:1) already points out. If we agree with this statement, then it becomes important to reject the claim that Thales is the first philosopher as ill-founded and logically out of place. Those who promote the claims that Thales is the first philosopher are promoters of the propaganda of the West.

In our own opinion, philosophy began with man's existence. There are many obstacles, challenges, wonder, curiosity that causes man to reflect deeply. J.I Omeregbe, on the nature of philosophy argues that:

> To reflect on such questions in search of explanations or answers is to philosophize. There is no part of the world where men never reflect on such basic questions about the human person or about the physical universe. In other words, there is no part of the world where men do not philosophize. The tendency to reflect on such fundamental philosophic questions is part of human nature; it is rooted in man's natural instinct of curiosity – the instinct to know (Omeregbe;1985: 1).

The above excerpt makes our point more obvious. There is no particular race that is endowed with the ability to philosophize while others lack this gift. Notable Western philosophers who have denied the Africa the possibility of any reflective activities are Friedrich Hegel, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Hobbes etc. Friedrich Hegel, for instance, saw philosophy as the self-consciousness of the Absolute Spirit was led by racism to say that in Africa, the Spirit had not yet attained self-consciousness, meaning that there is no philosophy in Africa, no rationality, no thinking. But the above analysis has shown that their claims are ill founded. Just as we have intellectuals who promote ideologies in any other sector of the society, some African philosophers were also quick to admit that philosophy

was alien to Africans on the grounds that what the Africans engaged in was bald and non-argumentative; they called it folk philosophy. A prominent scholar who holds such position is the Ghanaian philosopher, Kwasi Wiredu, who in 1980 argues that: "without argument and clarification, there is strictly, no philosophy."(Wiredu;1980: 47) Our analysis will not pursue the apologist and non-apologists views on the existence or non-existence of African philosophy as we see this to be of little relevance to this discourse. The point we exhume from this analysis is that the denial of a philosophizing ability in Africa merely points to the advancement of ideologies of Western hegemony on other parts of the world.

On the whole, philosophy is a rational enquiry of anything to produce and explain something. It is synonymous with humans regardless of their race and culture. Every attempt to deprive Africans the ability to philosophize holds no water. Hence, philosophy in our own opinion is in every man and not until one comes to the four walls of a lecture hall can one reflect as Henry Odera Oruka points out in his philosophic sagacity.

Self-Assessment Exercise

1. Philosophy has a univocal definition (a) Yes (b) no

2. Who said philosophy cannot exist without argument? (a) Omeregbe (b) Oruka (c) Wiredu (d) Sogolo

1.4 Summary

This unit has been able to revise what we know about philosophy. This is crucial for the purpose of assisting or helping us understand the task at hand where philosophy will be used to interrogate arts and literature in the later parts of this text.

1.5 References/Further Readings/Web Sources

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1.6 Possible Answers to SAE

1. (b); 2. (c)

Unit 2: The Tools of Philosophy

2.1 Introduction

It is privilege to welcome you to another interactive period in this unit. Today we will be looking at some of the tools that are peculiar to the plight of philosophy. These tools are so important that we cannot do without them. Do you know these two tools? Have you come across them before? Let us commence!

2.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this discussion, students would be able to:

1. Identify at least two philosophical tools; and
2. Critically evaluate the importance of these two tools in philosophy

2.3 Logic as a Philosophical Tool

Logic has been construed as study of the techniques for detecting and making distinctions between valid and invalid arguments (see Copi 1972; Cohen & Nagel 1978). According to Kazeem Fayemi (2020, 127), "Logic is an instrument that improves ordinary language through detection, and avoids errors in thinking and language use across all varieties." The first intellectual comprehension of the paramount place of logic for linguistic expression, formulation and the articulation of ontology may be adduced to ancient Greek scholar, Aristotle. His *Metaphysics*

discloses the tandem between logic and ontology. Several centuries later, Michael Dummett (1965, 431), would write:

> When logic is taken in the broad sense in which it comprises the theory of meaning understood as a branch of philosophy, the idea of logic has no metaphysical, that is, no ontological component is a delusion. There cannot be an aseptic logic that merely informs us how language functions and what is the structure of thought which is expressed without committing itself to anything concerning reality, since reality is what we speak about... and an account of language demands an account of how what we say is about reality and is rendered true or false by how things are in reality

Dummett's finding had already been deciphered and even invoked hitherto, by Aristotle. This finds justification via Susan Stebbing's (1961, xii) position that whoever seeks to study the history of Western ontology ought to first be grounded in Aristotle's logic.

One paramount truth to deduce from the perspectives of Aristotle, Dummett and Stebbing is that logic is always about something. It is about reality and the expression of this reality in intelligible terms. This is why Marxian logic, according to its proponents, relays that it is impossible to do logic independent of reality (see Zeleny 1980).

2.4 Language as a Philosophical Tool

Language, as used in this research "is a system of communication that relates what is to be communicated with something that communicates (Fayemi 2020, 126). It is a mediating agent that humans use for expressing their thoughts or ideas. When it is not to be denied that language is composed of some basic or formal rules, which are socially determined, the right or wrong application of these rules necessarily invite logic. This is what prompts Oghenekaro Ogbinaka (2002) to

have taken the position that it is not possible for logic to exist without language. For him, it is language that makes it possible to have logic. Kazeem Fayemi (2020, 126) expatiates in this connection: “Thus, the existence of culture presupposes the existence of logic, and presumably, the existence of language presupposes the existence of culture. Thought, which is prior to language, is expressed through language and it is an instrument of logical study.”

In a nutshell, it is important to understand that it is via language that humans are able to express their mind-views. The capacity to express thoughts and concepts correctly and incorrectly necessarily admits logic. This is why it has been remarked that “Without language, logic would be impossible, and without logic, language would be unintelligible. Man’s ability to use language meaningfully presupposes a fundamental logical disposition” (Fayemi 2020, 126). To justify this position, it is important to return to language’s aim of expressing thoughts and where or how logic is invoked into the process.

Language, it must be said, may be seen from the syntactic and semantic angles. In the class of the former are words, the parts of speech, clauses, phrases and sentences. In the latter, there are: sense, thought, reference or meaning and truth-value (Frege 1956). It is through the correct usage of language along these two paths that humans are able to evaluate and reality the world intelligibly. The excessive trust in the capacity that language expresses thought-contents is one of the over-riding motivations and emergence of the analytic tradition of philosophy. Frege, the adduced founding father of analytic philosophy explains better, while explaining the importance of logic: “All sciences have truth as their goal; but logic is also concerned with it in a quite different way from this. It has much the same relation to truth as physics has to weight or heat. To discover truth is the task of all sciences; it falls to logic to discern the laws of truth” (Frege 1956, 289).

2.5 Criticism as a Philosophical Tool

The idea of philosophy being criticism appears to capture the central nature of philosophical discourse. It may be explained or understood by looking at one of the philosophers who embodied this understanding of the nature of philosophy. Socrates is one of the earliest to engage in philosophic criticism. For Socrates, criticism referred to critical thinking involving a *dialectic* in the conversation. A dialectic is a running debate with claims, counter-claims, qualifications, corrections, and compromises in the sincere hope of getting to understand a concept. This may be seen in Plato's *Republic* (Bk. I). Socrates asked Cephalus what his greatest blessing of wealth had been. Cephalus replied that a sense of justice had come from it. Socrates then asked: what is justice? The conversation then involved several people including Thrasymachus who claimed that justicewas a mere ploy of the strong to keep the weak in line. Socrates rejected the tyrant-theory as irrational and the dialectic went on in pursuit of the question: what is justice?

The idea of criticism could be conceived of as an attempt to clear away shabby thinking and establish concepts with greater precision and meaning. In this sense, John Dewey (1980: 39) noted that:

> Philosophy is inherently criticism, having its distinctive position among various modes of criticism in its generality; a criticism of criticism as it was. Criticism is discriminating judgement, careful appraisal, and judgement is appropriately termed criticism wherever the subject-matter of discrimination concerns goods or values.

Another example of criticism is the philosophic movement associated with the name of Edmund Husserl who is the father of phenomenology. Phenomenology is a method of criticism aiming to investigate the essenceof anything. The essence of love, justice, courage, and any other idea may be dealt with critically, and a

tentative conclusion reached. Such criticism is vital to philosophy as well as to other disciplines.

As you go on in your study, you must be careful so as not to confused criticism with scepticism. Scepticism as an idea connotes a critical spirit. It is the tendency of not being easily satisfied with simple or superficial evidence and striving to accept only incorrigible beliefs that are absolutely certain. The sceptics strive to establish that there is the need to cast doubt on the existence of all things if that is not possible, then we can affirm that objective knowledge is unattainable. On the other hand, criticism is carried on for the pursuit of purer, or better knowledge. Sometimes scepticism may be viewed as a stepping stone to knowledge. Unfortunately, scepticism frequently degenerates to irresponsible negativism. When this happens, scepticism becomes a willful, self-serving activity rather than the pursuit of knowledge.

Criticism as the activity of philosophy has been fairly popular in the contemporary scene. Robert Paul Wolff (1979: 21) describes philosophy as the activity of careful reasoning with clarity and logical rigor controlling it. Such an activity has strong faith in the power of reason, and it is an activity in which reason leads to truth.

Self-Assessment Exercise

1. Frege is popular known as a _____

2. Who said logic must be understood before reading western philosophy? (a) Stebbing (b) Aristotle (c) Staniland (d) Russell

2.6 Summary

The essence of the present discussion has been to show how logic and language interact and present themselves as tools that are indispensable in philosophy. It is clear that your understanding of some tools of philosophy has improved in this

discussion. With this in place, the attention now shifts to place of philosophy and its interrogation of other disciplines via these tools.

2.7 References/Further Readings/Web Sources

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2.8 Possible Answers to SAE

1. Mathematician/logicin; 2. (a).

Unit 3: Philosophy and Other Disciplines

3.1 Introduction

The study of the place of philosophy continues as we now turn to the place that philosophy occupies in other disciplines. What we mean here is that our task is to look at how philosophy applies its tools in assessing the knowledge claims of other disciplines. Are you ready for this adventure? Let us commence!

3.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this study, you will be able to:

1. Itemise at least three ways that philosophy interrogates other disciplines; and
2. Critically assess the function of philosophy of other disciplines

3.3 The Principal Character of Philosophy of Other Disciplines

Today, our attention will be occupied by the ways that the philosophy of other disciplines function. What this means is the ways through which philosophy applies its tools to other disciplines such as social sciences, biology, economics to name a few. This is why we have philosophy of social sciences, philosophy of biology and philosophy of economics. It should therefore not surprise you that the title of this course is philosophy of arts and literature.

You need to know from the outset that the relationship between philosophy and

other disciplines is based on the former's role in the analysis and critique of other disciplines. Philosophy of other disciplines, is out to study the various goals and methods of other disciplines, with the aim of evaluating whether the discipline is able to live up to the expectation of humanity. Philosophy of the other disciplines ponders on certain issues inherited from other disciplines such as the natural science, the social science and also reflects on problems and issuesgenerated by its own peculiar disciplinary orientation. For example, the area of philosophy of arts and literature, which is the subject matter of this Course seeks to tend to the assessment of the appropriate methodology and the extent to which arts and literature may have philosophical underpinnings.

Some of the central problems that philosophers of other disciplines address include (1) the extent to which one can say that humanity and life in general, which the other disciplines claim to study can increase global knowledge; (2) the extent to which human rationality can be reliable after philosophical assessment by using the philosophic methods already discussed; (3) the rational basis upon which the results and findings of other disciplines can be used to predict and control future occurrences; (4) the extent of to which the themes, logic and the method of other disciplines are distinctively peculiar

Self-Assessment Exercises

1. Philosophy of other disciplines is a branch of philosophy (a) True (b) False

2. What focuses on the extent to which one can say that humanity and life in general, which the other disciplines claim to study can increase global knowledge (a) Logic (b) Language (c) Philosophy of other disciplines (d) scientific inquiry

3.4 Summary

The present discussion has been to provide a very brief exposition concerning the place of philosophy in other disciplines. This discussion is already setting the

foundation or basis for what the focus of this course is going to critically examine – philosophy of arts and literature.

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3.6 Possible Answers to SAE

1. (a); 2. (c)

Unit 4: Aesthetics as a Branch of Philosophy

4.1 Introduction

In this discussion we are now going to talk about a very important aspect of philosophy and its relationship to the title of this course – philosophy of arts and literature. Are you ready for this adventure? Once you are able to understand the discussion here, later explorations and units will be easier to follow. Let us then commence this adventure of learning.

4.2 Learning Outcomes

At the end of this unit, learners should be able to:

1. Provide at least one definition of aesthetics as a branch of philosophy; and
2. Identify the relationship between aesthetics and of art works

4.3 What is Aesthetics?

It will be helpful to commence with the understanding that "aesthetics may be defined narrowly as the theory of beauty, or more broadly as that together with the philosophy of art" (Slater 2023). From another angle, it may be seen as a branch of philosophy which deals with the study of beauty and artistic tastes as well as the philosophy of art. What kind of feeling does the perception of artworks invoke in us?

The traditional interest in beauty itself broadened, in the eighteenth century, to include the sublime, and since 1950 or so the number of pure aesthetic concepts discussed in the literature has expanded even more. Traditionally, the philosophy of art concentrated on its definition, but recently this has not been the focus, with careful analyses of aspects of art largely replacing it (Slater 2023). Philosophical aesthetics is here considered to center on these latter-day developments. Thus, after a survey of ideas about beauty and related concepts, questions about the value of aesthetic experience and the variety of aesthetic attitudes will be addressed, before turning to matters which separate art from pure aesthetics, notably the presence of intention. That will lead to a survey of some of the main definitions of art which have been proposed, together with an account of the recent "de-definition" period. The concepts of expression, representation, and the nature of art objects will then be covered (Slater 2023).

Kant is sometimes thought of as a formalist in art theory; that is to say, someone who thinks the content of a work of art is not of aesthetic interest. But this is only part of the story. Certainly he was a formalist about the pure enjoyment of nature, but for Kant most of the arts were impure, because they involved a "concept." Even the enjoyment of parts of nature was impure, namely when a concept was involved— as when we admire the perfection of an animal body or a human torso. But our enjoyment of, for instance, the arbitrary abstract patterns in some foliage, or a color field (as with wild poppies, or a sunset) was, according to Kant, absent of such concepts; in such cases, the cognitive powers were in free play. By design, art may sometimes obtain the appearance of this freedom: it was then "Fine Art"—but for Kant not all art had this quality (Slate 2023).

Closely-knitted to the idea of aesthetics is the aesthetic attitude. It talks about the way that we perceive objects of artworks. The aesthetic attitude is dissimilar to the natural attitude of perceiving and passing judgments on things. Nevertheless it is

crucial to add that aesthetics covers both natural and artificial sources of experiences and how we form a judgment about those sources. It considers what happens in our minds when we engage with objects or environments such as viewing visual art, listening to music, reading poetry, experiencing a play, watching a fashion show, movie, sports or even exploring various aspects of nature. The philosophy of art specifically studies how artists imagine, create, and perform works of art, as well as how people use, enjoy, and criticize art. Aesthetics considers why people like some works of art and not others, as well as how art can affect moods or even our beliefs (Munro 1986). Both aesthetics and the philosophy of art try to find answers for what exactly is art, artwork, or what makes a good art.

Self-Assessment Exercise

1. Both _____ and the philosophy of art try to find answers for what exactly is art, artwork, or what makes a good art

2. Who is a formalist in the theory of art? (a) Collingwood (b) Plato (c) Kant (d) Descartes

4.4 Summary

In our discussion thus far, we have been able to explore the meaning of aesthetics, being a branch of philosophy. We have argued that it is about the study of the expression or impression invoked in us by artworks in their various manifestations. With this knowledge in hand, we are now in a better position or situation to assess the popular aesthetic theories of art in the next discussion.

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4.6 Possible Answers to SAE

1. Aesthetics; 2. (c)

Unit 5: Aesthetic Theories on Artworks

5.1 Introduction

Welcome once again to another session where we will be deepening our understanding of aesthetics. This session is going to provide us with four popular ways of conceiving and assessing artworks. Each of them will be given a brief exposition in order to aid out comprehension of the importance of aesthetics on artworks. Let us now get started!

5.2 Learning Outcomes

At the end of this unit, learners should be able to:

1. Itemize four theories of art; and
2. Critically evaluate these theories

5.3 Theories for Judging Artworks

As we already know by now we have already talked about aesthetics. Now, in order to see how aesthetics is important concerning how we assess artworks, the

first thing is to know the four popular approaches. In the discussion that follow, each of the will be discussed.

5.3.1 Art as Imitation/Representation

Imitation means copying the real thing. Of course this is pretty simple! When a photographer captures you image, the produce is an imitation of the real you. Another word for this approach to art is representationalism. The Greek word that captures imitation is "mimesis." Plato and Aristotle spoke of mimesis as the re-presentation of nature. According to Plato, all artistic creation is a form of imitation: that which really exists (in the "world of ideas") is a type created by God; the concrete things man perceives in his existence are shadowy representations of this ideal type. Therefore, the painter, the tragedian, and the musician are imitators of an imitation, twice removed from the truth. Aristotle, speaking of tragedy, stressed the point that it was an "imitation of an action"—that of a man falling from a higher to a lower estate. Shakespeare, in Hamlet's speech to the actors, referred to the purpose of playing as being "…to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature." Thus, an artist, by skillfully selecting and presenting his material, may purposefully seek to "imitate" the action of life (Britannica 2023). The most popular philosophers who take this approach to art seriously are Plato and Aristotle.

5.3.2 Art as a Form

Another popular name for this approach to understanding artworks is formalism. And as already indicated in the last discussion, Kant is a philosopher that endorses formalism. What this approach to art is talking about is how the artwork presents itself to us in terms of colour, shape, texture, lining etc. It also talks about its medium whether it is in documents, oral or in performance such as music.

The import of formalism can best be seen by noting what it was reacting against: art as representation, art as expression, art as a vehicle of truth or knowledge or moral betterment or social improvement. Formalists do not deny that art is capable of doing these things, but they believe that the true purpose of art is subverted by its being made to do these things (Britannica 2023). "Art for art's sake, not art for life's sake" is the watchword of formalism. Art is there to be enjoyed, to be savoured, for the perception of the intricate arrangements of lines and colours, of musical tones, of words, and combinations of these. By means of these mediums it is true that objects in the world can be represented, scenes from life depicted, and emotions from life expressed, but these are irrelevant to the principal purpose of art. Indeed, art is much less adapted to the telling of a story or the representation of the world than it is to the presentation of colours, sounds, and other items in the art medium simply for their own sake (Britannica 2023).

5.3.3 Art as Instrument

This is also known as instrumentalism. The basic underlying ideology of this theory is that artworks must serve some purpose or ends. It does not accept like the formalists do, that art is art for its own sake. The artwork that has an end in mind is usually political, social, moral or even possessing the capacity for social change. It is seen as an art which communicates a message. This is the sense in which the late Fela Anikulapo (whose ideas will be looked upon in Module 2) sees his musical art – a means for consciousness-raising and social change. In a nutshell, for this theory, the best artworks are those that convey a message or shape how we see the world. Unlike other theories, instrumentalism suggests that art is good when it attempts to change or impact society in some way (Pauljamesgallery 2021)

5.3.4 Art as Emotion

This is also known as emotionalism. Emotionalism places importance on the expressive qualities of an artwork (Pauljamesgallery 2021). There is importance

placed on the communication between artwork and its viewer, if the art has managed to evoke a feeling from the audience, then the artist has created a brilliant piece. Emotionalism is unique among other art theories because it is not concerned with what drew the viewer to the piece, it only matters that the artist was able to evoke a mood or idea – regardless of anything else (Pauljamesgallery 2021). From another perspective, this form of art is widely thought that the capacity of artworks to arouse emotions in audiences is a perfectly natural and unproblemmatic fact. It just seems obvious that we can feel sadness or pity for fictional characters, fear at the view of threatening monsters on the movie screen, and joy upon listening to upbeat, happy songs. This may be why so many of us are consumers of art in the first place (Naar 2023). This is possible in some Bollywood movies where the scenes and story twists will evoke some sense of emotion and tears from us. This is a clear indication of how artworks function in the emotional sense.

Self-Assessment Exercise

1. Who is a formalist? (a) Kant (b) Da Vinci (c) Naar (d) Slater

2. Which kind of art makes us see artworks as serving some purpose? (a) Emotion (b) representation (c) instrumental (d) formal

5.4 Summary

In today's discussion, we have been able examine the most popular theories of art and how they can assist us with understanding the meaning of aesthetics. With this, we have been able to understand the main idea of aesthetics as a branch of philosophy and this will help us in the modules ahead as we assess some artworks in order to exhume their social and philosophical importance.

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5.6 Possible Answers to SAE

1. (a); 2. (c)

End of Module Exercises

1. The outlook that logic and language are important is beyond negotiation. (a) True (b) False

2. Aristotle's logic has _____ numbers of truth values

3. Scepticism is synonymous with _____ as a philosophical tool

4. The Philosophy of other disciplines examines the irrational basis upon which the results and findings of other disciplines can be used to predict and control future occurrences (a) True (b) False

5. What may be defined narrowly as the theory of beauty, or more broadly as that together with the philosophy of art? (a) Art (b) Beauty (c) Aesthetics (d) Philosophy

6. Another concept for imitationism is _____

Module 2: The Theory of Instrumentalism and African Works of Art

Unit 1: Autonomy, Quasi-Realism and Aesthetic Judgment

Unit 2: Instrumentalism and African Art

Unit 3: Art as Social Practice

Unit 4: Music as a weapon of social change: A Study of Fela Anikulapo's "Blackism"

Unit 1: Autonomy, Quasi-Realism and Aesthetic Judgment

1.1 Introduction

The focus of the present discussion is to increase our knowledge from the previous module and discussions on the nature of art and how judgment is passed. So, on this note, the idea of quasi-realism and how it assists us with making some practical judgment over artworks will be considered.

1.2 Learning Outcomes

After this discussion, learners would have been able to:

1. Define the meaning of quasi-realism
2. Define the concept of autonomy in artworks; and
3. Critically evaluate autonomous conceptions of artwork.

1.3 Quasi-Realism in Practical Judgment

Quasi-realism is the outlook that aesthetic judgments are not propositions but emotional attitudes. By implication, their emotional attitude is what makes them autonomous. It is therefore important to begin this section by explaining what is meant by autonomy and how it informs a quasi-realistic perspective.

In his 2008 publication, Iain King perceives autonomy as: “Let people choose for themselves, unless we know their interests better than they can” (King 2008: 100).

Implied in the position of King is the dearth in autonomy, when one even does not know or unconscious of his/her interests. Wee babies, comatose and unconscious persons for instance, cannot have autonomy, from the yardstick of King. Clearly, there is more to the concept other than merely perceiving autonomy as the freedom from external coercion. In the words of Patrick Hanks autonomy connotes the "doctrine that individual human will contains its own principles and laws" (Hanks 1976: 137). One must be made aware of another key term or state of affairs that enter the discursive fray, given these analyses – solipsism. If it is established that each individual has its distinct principles and laws, perhaps unique to it, necessarily solipsism will be the output. It is also the case that solipsism is the opinion that "only the self can be known to exist" (Cayne 1992: 944). John Hospers dubs solipsism as "myself-aloneism" (Hospers 1999). This clarification of concepts at this stage is pertinent because most of the Western literatures on autonomy take for granted the solipsistic implication redolent in it. For if autonomy is the basis for moral and practical judgments, the foremost consequence is A (could be a subject or perceiver) would not know about the existence of B (object of perception) of whom s/he judges. The philosophical problem regarding the knowledge of the existence of other minds is therefore resurrected. At this juncture, it is pertinent to then explore the meaning of quasi-realism.

Quasi-realism is "the view that we must explain our thought and talk concerning normative matters – which involve many features that motivate realist views – in terms that do not presuppose the existence of normative properties, facts, and such" (Toppinen 2014). It is suggestive that a quasi-realist who wishes to do justice to common sense must also countenance the existence of normative beliefs [(Divers and Miller 1995: 37); (Dreier 2004: 23); (Timmons 1999). Meanwhile, it needs to be hinted that for being a non-cognitivist version of expressivism, quasi-realism has been a subject of controversy regarding its ability to pass as a paragon

for aesthetic judgments. While chronicling the essence of quasi-realism, its prime proponent Simon Blackstone in an interview with Darlei Dall' Agnol harps:

> I tried to give an account of what are we doing when we use language in that way. But that would be both an explanation of what we are doing and also a justification. It wouldn't give any motive, any account of the content, of the reasons, of the motivations, of the error theory. So, that was the program. I called it "quasi-realism" because it starts from with an emotivist, a fundamental expressionist, account of the fundamental elements of what we are doing when we moralize. And that is a particular activity, a particular thing you do, which is basically to express attitudes, to put pressure on plans, intentions, conducts. It's something practical. But we talk as if there were a truth in that talk, that´s why the *quasi* (Dall Agnol 2002:102).

The foregoing clearly reveals the idea of autonomy embedded in the concept of quasi-realism. It must also be stressed that there is hardly any discourse on the principle of autonomy in aesthetic judgment that takes no cue from Immanuel Kant. In his analysis of the connection between autonomy and the aesthetic attitude, Kant avers:

> …[The judger] clearly perceives that the approval of others affords no valid proof, available for the estimate of beauty. He recognises that others, perchance, may see and observe for him, and that, what many have seen in one and the same way may, for the purpose of a theoretical, and therefore logical judgement, serve as an adequate ground of proof for him, albeit he believes he saw otherwise, but that what has pleased others can never serve him as the ground of an aesthetic judgment. The judgement of others, where unfavourable to ours, may, no doubt, rightly make us suspicious in respect of our own, but

> convincing us that it is wrong it never can (Kant 1952).

The above is reminiscent of quasi-realism, at least as interpreted by Hopkins (2001). It has become commonplace for discussion as to why some statements or stances would admit autonomy when others do not billet it. This is because for ordinary judgements, one may need to have a change of mind in the face of the judgment of the overwhelming majority. However, as Kant avers in the foregoing excerpt, "what has pleased others can never serve him as the ground for an aesthetic judgment" (Kant 1952). Evidently, one needs no expatiation to justify that Kant subscribes to autonomy in aesthetic judgments. This also implies quasi-realism since the aesthetic attitude and the consequent judgment are suggestive of emotions and individuality. The main thrust now is whether a quasi-realist position gives a correct verdict on aesthetic judgment. This tinkering has thrown scholars into divergent polarities. In the words of Christopher Doyle:

> For ordinary judgements it is often the case that it may be justifiable to change one's mind given that others agree in holding an opposing view. In the case of judgements of beauty this is never the case; these are autonomous. Robert Hopkins has discussed the following (familiar) explanation: Judgements of beauty are not genuine *assertions* at all; rather they are *expressions* of some response or experience. Since to *acknowledge* the disagreement of others is not to *respond* to objects as they do, this acknowledgement needn't (nor could it) render it appropriate to change one's aesthetic judgement (Dowling 2006: 100).

Hopkins in particular seems to be in doubt if any version of quasi-realism can explain aesthetic autonomy. His argument is very convincing, simple and straightforward. Hopkins believes the following two 'fault allocating' arguments - (A) as applicable in the case of non-aesthetic judgements, (B) as applicable in aesthetic cases – to be formally on a par. Each justifies, according to Hopkins, contra the quasi-realist, a change of mind given the fault considerations. In other

words, the moment a judger reassess the subject matter as a result of a contrary consensus, the quasi-realist talk of autonomy founders. Let us consider his arguments tersely.

Hopkins relies heavily on the position of Crispin Wright (1992), that in standard cases empirical talk is subject to cognitive command: "When disagreement arises it will be *a priori* that one side must lack warrant: that either my opponent or I will be at fault. One can then deploy fault considerations to find out which is and which is not the case" (Hopkins 2001: 170). The fault consideration may be formulated thus:

> Since my opponents outnumber me; in general and they are equally competent in matters of this sort; all have tried to access the facts in the same way - it is more likely that I am at cognitive fault than that they are (Hopkins 2001: 170).

From the foregoing, Hopkins deduces: "Hence I ought to reject my view and accept theirs" (Hopkins 2001: 170). In constructing a conceivable quasi-realism about the aesthetic, Christopher Dowling posits that "Hopkins offers something analogous to cognitive command such that when conflict occurs one party will be at fault" (Hopkins 2001: 170). It is important to consider the argument employed by Hopkins, albeit tersely to see why he doubts the possibility of any form of quasi-realism as a basis for aesthetic judgment.

Argument A:

(1a) I and my opponents disagree over whether *p*

(2) One of us is at fault

(3) They outnumber me, in general I and they are equally competent in matters of this sort, and we've all tried to access the facts in the same way.

So

(4) It is likely that I am at fault.

So

(5a) $p/\neg p$ [i.e. whichever claim the opponents make]

Argument B:

(1b) I and my opponents disagree over whether O is beautiful

(2) One of us is at fault

(3) They outnumber me, in general I and they are equally competent in matters of this sort, and we've all tried to access the facts in the same way.

So

(4) It is likely that I am at fault.

So

(5b) O is beautiful/ It is not the case that O is beautiful [i.e. whichever claim the opponents make]

Hopkins holds that the quasi-realist must accept - given (A) - that an argument of this form can justify, in the aesthetic context, someone in the move from (1)-(4). In so doing one will become (as was hoped) more cautious and willing to try the matter by experiencing the disputed object anew. Under the quasi-realist's commitment to expressivism, one should be protected from the pressure to move from (4) to (5) if one lacks the appropriate response to the object in question. However, Hopkins objects that it is not clear why this should be so (Hopkins 2001: 102-4). Argument (B), in reflecting the form of (A), *does* commit the judger to a change of mind in the aesthetic case. We would expect the quasi-realist to be committed to the view that expressive claims *can* play a role in cogent arguments, so we should expect the conclusion to follow. In light of this commitment Hopkins does not believe the quasi-realist can have anything to say to explain or to save autonomy (Hopkins 2001: 102-4).

It is not untrue that for Hopkins, the instances of (A) and (B) clearly reveal that contra Kant, even the pressure and judgment of others in aesthetic matters could still implore one to revise an earlier stance or even have a change of mind. This is true if one recalls Kant's recommendation that "…what has pleased others can never serve him as the ground for an aesthetic judgement" (Kant, 1952). The argument provided by Hopkins against the viability of any form of quasi-realism in aesthetic only holds in the Western aesthetic tradition.

From the foregoing, it is clear that much as this study admits and accepts with Hopkins, the skepticism of any form of quasi-realism for aesthetic judgments, solipsism is another crucial problem that surfaces.

Self-Assessment Exercise

1. Practical judgment command emotions alone (a) True (b) false

2. Quasi-realism is autonomous in nature (a) True (b) False

1.4 Summary

In this section, attention has been adduced to the concept of quasi-realism as a means of understanding the nature of passing autonomous judgment in artworks. In the discussions that will be encountered in the remaining parts of this module, the practical discussions concerning artworks will be used to make the discussion on the various theories aesthetics to be understood.

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1.6 Possible Answers to SAE

1. (b); 2. (a)

Unit 2: Instrumentalism and African Art

2.1 Introduction

Today, we are going to provide some practical illustrations so that students will be able to easily relate with the theories and arguments which this discussion have been looking at before now. The African means of looking at artworks as necessarily an instrument is going to be the attention today. Are you ready for this exploration?

2.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this study, the learners should be able to:

1. Identify the theory of art which is applicable to Africans; and
2. Evaluate the outlook of art as social practice among Africans

2.3 Art as a Social Practice and Instrumentalism for Africans

It needs no elaboration as Innocent Onyewuenyi implores that "…African aesthetic standards are different from the 'accepted' standards of uniqueness and individuality; that African works of art are created as an answer to a problem and serve some practical end" (Onyewuenyi 1984: 237). Innocent Onyewuenyi defends the possibility of an African aesthetic on the grounds that "the general principle or standards of values of aesthetics, which is a branch of philosophy, are bound up intimately with a people's shift and constitution, and are a factor in their

life history, subject to the conditions of race, culture and civilization" (Onyewuenyi 1984: 239). This does not make traditional Africans inferior in reason or outlook. This is why one must glean from the outset that "the mind of the African is not structurally different from that of the Westerner… The truth is that both are similarly marked by the same basic features of the human species. The difference lies in the ways the two societies conceive of reality and explain objects and events. This is so because they live different forms of life" (Sogolo 1993: 74). The claim being emphasized here is that for the traditional African, artworks and the attitude given to them are in line with the entire body of the African connection with reality. In this vein Onyewuenyi expatiates:

> Works of art are expressions of ritual and religion, as clues to the temperament of the tribe and society, as language in a culture without writing, must do all these in service to the community whose ritual and religion they express, whose temperament they reveal, the being of whose ancestors they participate in. Hence, African art is functional, community-oriented, depersonalized, contextualized and embedded (Onyewuenyi 1984: 243).

The implication of the foregoing claim is that for the traditional African, the notion of "art for arts' sake" is a non-existent. This intellectual perspective has also been stated by Nkiru Nzegwu when she pens that "…the critical question in creativity is no longer what constitutes a work of art, but what the relationship between creative objects and social life is in a given society" (Nzegwu 2004: 415). It must be made known however, that this idea of a community and practical orientation for the creation of art among traditional African is not new at all. This has come to be termed by Robert Eldridge as 'art as a social practice'. As a way of justifying his claim Eldridge opines that: "In beginning to try to be articulate about what in various works of art distinctly moves us, it is important to remember that making and responding to works of art, in many media, are *social* practices" (Elridge 2003: 5). Incidentally, the notion of art as social practice is extendable to traditional Africans precisely because:

> It is inconceivable that these practices are the invention of any distinct individual. Any intention on the part of an individual to make art would be empty, were there no already going practices of artistic production and response. If there are no shared criteria for artistic success, then the word *art* cannot be used objectively, as a descriptive term (Elridge 2003: 5).

From the foregoing analysis of the nature and essence of the aesthetic attitude of traditional Africans toward works of art, it is clear that autonomous judgments and pronouncements do not persist. As a result, solipsism does not even occur to recur at any point. It is therefore correct, the claim African aesthetics is depersonalized. An individualistic perception of art is inconceivable for the African. If I have only myself to go on, then ‘‘whatever is going to seem right to me [to call art] is right. And that only means that here we can’t talk about ‘right’” (Wittgenstein 1958: 92).

Self-Assessment Exercise

1. For the traditional African, the notion of “art for arts’ sake” is a _____
2. Which theory captures African approach to art? (a) social cognitivism (b) expressionism (c) autonomy (d) formalism

2.4 Summary

In this discussion, students, you can see that when it comes to artworks Africans do not entertain the doctrine of autonomy or formalism. Art is seen as a social practice and when we use two indigenous examples from two African cultures in the next discussion, this will become evident more than ever.

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2.6 Possible Answers to SAE

1. non-existent; 2. (a)

Unit 3: Two Indigenous African Artworks and Instrumentalism

3.1 Introduction

Dear students, it is a privilege to welcome and discuss with you, two ways that artworks serve or portray themselves as instrumentalism in two indigenous African cultures: *Igbo* and *Yorùbá*. This discussion is going to bring to our knowledge things that we usually take for granted. Let us now begin!

3.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this study, learners should be able to:

1. Identify at least one artwork in each of *Igbo* and *Yorùbá* cultures; and
2. Critically evaluate the instrumental significance of these artworks for the *Igbo* and *Yorùbá*

3.3 *Igbo* and *Yorùbá* Artworks as Instrumental in Nature

Today, we will be talking about artworks in two indigenous African cultures. It is in the need for explanatory justification that this essay will employ popular traditional artworks among the *Igbo* and *Yorùbá* as a dais that autonomy via quasi-realism does not hold among the traditional Africans. The *ikenga* artwork will be the object of occupation shortly.

The *ikenga* is common among the *Igbo*, aboriginal to the South-East of Nigeria. While there are several traditions and renditions regarding the origin of the *Igbo* people, this research takes as axiomatic, the position of Emmanuel Edeh who explains:

> The Igbos are a people principally located in southeastern Nigeria, West Africa. They also extend to parts of the midwestern and delta regions of Nigeria. The Igbo land covers Imo, Anambra and the eastern part of Bendel states. It lies between latitude 5 to 6 degrees north, and longitude 6.1 to 8.5 degrees east, covering an area of approximately 16,000 square miles, it has borders on the east with the Ibibio people. On the west it is bounded by Bini and Warri people. The Igbos share their northern boundary with the Idomas; and their southern boundary with the Ijaws and the Ogoni. The river Niger, before emptying itself into the Atlantic Ocean through a network of tributaries, divides the Igboland into two unequal parts: the Western Igbos and the Eastern Igbos. The Western Igbos are only one-tenth of the total, whereas the Eastern Igbos constitute about eight-tenths. The rest of the Igbos are scattered in other parts of the world (Edeh 1985: 8-9).

The *Igbo* like any other African peoples are deeply metaphysical. This is clearly demonstrated in their art, particularly the *ikenga,* which is the occupation of this study. It is therefore important to hint from the outset that "with the *ikenga* we see how art objects are used in reinforcing self and cultivating assertiveness" (Nzegwu 2004: 420). Etymologically, the word '*ikenga*' connotes 'place of strength'. The *ikenga* appears as a wooden sculpture depicting personal success, power, affluence and achievement in life among the traditional *Igbo.* For Nkiru Nzegwu "*ikenga* are usually between six inches and six feet high and there are three stylistic types: the architectonic, the anthropomorphic, and the abstract cylindrical. Of the three, the most interesting to art historians have been the architectonic and anthropomorphic types, while the small portable type, generally favored by constantly traveling *dibias* (diviners and herbalists), attracts little attention" (Nzegwu 2004: 420). In her account of the artwork which is even more detailed, Nzegwu expounds that:

> The sculpture is presented as a human figure that is seated on a stool. A pair of horns emerges from the head of this sculpture. Breasts or the male genitalia may be visibly displayed. Still, a number of ikenga are not sexually marked even though the human

> form may be socially marked with *uli* body designs. Usually, the seated figure either carries a knife or machete, a gun, an *abana* (ceremonial sword), or an *otulaka* (small elephant tusk) in the left hand, and either a human skull (symbol of prowess), a full-size elephant tusk (symbol of wealth), or *akpa ego* (a bag of money) in the right hand (Nzegwu 2004: 420).

It is also interesting to note that sometimes, the sculptures are presented with special adornments of eagle feathers, coral beads and even special attires. Among the Ogwash-Ukwu *Igbo* component in Aniocha South Local Government Area in Delta State, the *ikenga*, is sometimes adorned with white piece of clothing, usually depicting purity or sanctity. These peoples perceive the *ikenga* as the spiritual projection of the individual, but more on this later. What is to be gleaned however is that even when the *Igbo* intends to carve his or her *ikenga,* the foregoing specifications initiated by the community must be put into serious consideration. It is for this reason that Cole and Aniakor chronicle that "symbols and motifs are usually community owned, and the immense sizes of the sculptures represent collective ownership" (Cole and Aniakor 1984: 31-2). Speaking on the significance of each of the usual typified presentations of the *ikenga*, Nkiru Nzegwu emphasizes thus:

> On the Igbo referent scheme, the horn is assigned the attribute of will power. It evokes a purposive force that cuts a swathe through life. Horns connote assertiveness, strength, daring, and persistence. Icons such as leopards, pythons, and antelopes that proliferate on the *ikenga* have socially assigned attributes…The machete, sword, or gun that is carried in the right hand represents the tool or instrument utilized by individuals in changing their material condition (Nzegwu, 2004: 421).

With the presentation of the *ikenga,* succinctly recounted, it needs to be established how this piece of artwork plays a metaphysical role, aside the aesthetic among the traditional *Igbo.* For them, the *ikenga* is necessarily connected to personhood, but also as a tool for the push for personal strife and success in life. More so, it is this connection with personhood that informs the life course of an individual in most cases. A little expiation is imperative in this connection.

As an artwork that is tied to personhood, it needs to be stated *ab initio*, that the *ikenga* plays a metaphysical role among the traditional *Igbo*. Usually, "it is simultaneously a spirit or psychic force, a sculptured piece, an icon for meditation, and a "text" of psychological principles in which "utilization" of the "text" unravels encoded knowledge" (Nzegwu 2004: 421). At the core, an *ikenga* is a part of the spirit in us. Each person is essentially a *mmuo* (spirit or vitalizing force that may have reincarnated many times with possibly different sex in each existence), and each *mmuo* embodies a *chi*. Each person has a *chi* that is conceived as a personal guardian spirit (*mmuo*) or personality essence that controls one's destiny (Nzegwu 2004: 421). The *ikenga,* as an aspect of the *chi,* is understood as the force that facilitates personal achievement and propels individuals to success (Nzegwu 2004: 421). Furthermore, the idea of *ikenga* is used to strike a balance between family obligations and individuality, and between free will and fate, by making an individual responsible for his or her successes or failures in life. A person's *ikenga* functions satisfactorily when it facilitates the individual's progress in accordance with her pre-birth life choices (Nzegwu 2004: 422).

It is therefore a consequent of the foregoing that "When one succeeds in one's ventures, one validates *ikenga* (the spirit force) using the sculpture as a visual interface with the inner. One gives it "food" and "drink" to thank it for being "awake". On escaping from danger one does the same; and if ill luck befalls one, one ''communes'' and prods one's *ikenga* (spirit force) to drive away the bad luck" (Nzegwu 2004: 422).

From the foregoing, it is established that traditional *Igbo* aesthetic attitude is lack of quasi-realism and its attendant autonomy. In traditional African aesthetic attitude, it is the case that there is immense emphasis on the community and artworks that promote group solidarity as well as individual well-being. The *ere-ìbéjì* among the traditional *Yorùbá,* will also reveal that traditional Africans share similar perceptions regarding works of art.

Etymologically, *ere-ìbéjì* is a coinage from two independent *Yorùbá* words. '*Ere*', depicts statue, image, effigy, figurine. *'Ìbéjì*' on the other hand, is the *Yorùbá* word for twin birth. In conjunction, *ere-ìbéjì* among the *Yorùbá* is literally translated as the 'sacred

image/statue of the twin'. This belief is common among all variations of the *Yorùbá.* This is why it is important to disinter that the *Yorùbá* is a major ethnic group in South-West Nigeria.

Undeniably, the *Yorùbá* constitutes one of the major ethnic groups of modern Nigeria. They effectively occupy the whole of *Ogun, Ondo, Oyo, Osun, Ekiti, Lagos,* and a substantial part of *Kwara* State (Atanda 1990: 1). Aside from Nigeria, the *Yorùbá* are also found in sizeable numbers in the south eastern part of the republic of Benin, Togo, and Dahomey in West Africa, in West India and in South Africa. There is also a thriving *Yorùbá* culture in South America and the Caribbean, especially Brazil and Cuba, where the descendants of the unwilling immigrants have been successful enough to maintain their distinctiveness to preserve their cultural and historical legacy. And for each of these, there are slight variations in dialect. The afore claim has been verified by Tunde Onadeko who reveals that: "Today, the *Yorùbá* live in three distinct regions: at home in Western Nigeria; in other West African countries, such as the southeastern Benin Republic and Togo; and outside of Africa, especially in South America, the West Indies, and Cuba (Diaspora)" (Onadeko 2008). However, for its purpose, this study will focus on the traditional *Yorùbá* most especially because of the failure of modernity to erode the salient aspects of this thought system.

It is an established fact that *Yorùbá* women "have one of the highest rates of twining in the world—it is estimated that out of every 1,000 births, 45-50 result in twins. Twins are revered among the Yoruba and come into this world with the protection of the *orisha* (deity) *Shango* who is evoked at the baby's naming ceremony. Due to the low birth weight of twins and the high infant mortality rates in Nigeria, many twin babies do not live long (Klemm 2010). Hence, when one or both of these twins die, *Ifá* divination takes sway. The diviner, popular called *babalawo* (for a man) and *iyanifa* (for a woman) will find if the cause is spiritual and if this is the case s/he "…will help the parents find a carver to create an *ere-ìbéjì* figure. An *ere-ìbéjì* is a wooden carving of a male or female figure once used by the Yoruba. The figure is thought to be a focal point for the spiritual energy of the deceased twin who, according to Yoruba traditional thought, resides in the

supernatural realm where he/she is cared for by a spiritual mother" (Klemm 2010). It has therefore become a general belief among the traditional *Yorùbá*, in the words of Peri Klemm that:

> Families, particularly grieving mothers, take comfort in the belief that a spiritual mother is caring for and guarding the departed child. The Ere ibeji is ritually washed, fed, clothed and carried in a cloth wrapper on the mother's back as a real baby would be carried (Klemm 2010).

What can be gleaned from the traditional *Yorùbá* understanding of the *ere-ìbéjì* statue is definitely not 'art for arts' sake' but art for some targeted end. And this targeted end needs no elaboration for being community but not autonomy-dependent. This is why a quasi-realistic aesthetic attitude among traditional Africans is futile.

However, it is not to be contested that most of the foregoing claims regarding traditional *Igbo* and *Yorùbá* conditioning of artwork will not only baffle the mind of the Westerner but will also seem to be uncritical on first showing, since it is merely descriptive. However, profound analytic scholar, Ludwig Wittgenstein does not mind a descriptive approach to analyzing ideas. For him, "we must do away with all explanation and description alone must take place" (Wittgenstein 1963:109). He submits that "philosophy neither explains nor deduced anything" (Wittgenstein 1963:126). Traditional *Igbo* and *Yorùbá* aesthetics may be descriptive. It is however, the task of the philosopher of the present era to ensure a critical plight is initiated. Hence, it is within this spectrum that a proper description and analysis of the unique aesthetic attitude of the traditional *Igbo* and *Yorùbá* may become important in modern times to combat the influx and hold of Western art appreciation and outlooks. It needs to be stressed however, that in the quest for improvement and advancement in ideas and creativity, the critical and logical methods of philosophy are not to be excluded. Continuous critical assessment of life and its foundation is very pertinent. H.S. Staniland shares this optimism too when she chronicles that "philosophy is the criticisms of the ideas we live by" (Staniland 1979: 3). So in a way, much as description is important, critical appraisal is also essential for any philosophic culture to thrive.

From the exploration of the conception of artworks among the traditional *Igbo* and *Yorùbá,* it may be revealed that a metaphysical significance is attached to objects of artistic creation. These objects usually must share some qualities put in place by the society for them to be categorized as effective or efficient for the said metaphysical significance. Having used the traditional *Igbo* and *Yorùbá* as research paradigm, it will be unwise to generalize that *all* traditional Africans share this aesthetic attitude to objects of art. The point however, is that there is a common denominator among traditional Africans that art must have a specific goal.

Self-Assessment Exercise

1. For Africans, which theory of art is more applicable? (a) formalism (b) instrumentalism (c) emotionism (d) imitationism

2. An *ere-ìbéjì* is a wooden carving of a male or female figure once used by the _____

3.4 Summary

With this illustration from two indigenous African cultures, we have been able to provide a robust discussion concerning the ways that artworks not only have instrumental ends but also have metaphysical significance in traditional African culture. Now that this practical illustration has been undertaken, the next move is to proceed to Fela's art as an expression of another theory of aesthetics where music is seen as an instrument in contemporary times.

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3.6 Possible Answers to SAE

1. (b); 2. Yoruba

Unit 4: Music as a weapon of social change: A Study of Fela Anikulapo's "Blackism"

4.1 Introduction

The topic of the day is to see how artworks continue to serve instrumental ends among Africans even in postcolonial times. Today, we are going to consider how Fela's idea of "blackism" or "Africanism" is mediated through his music for change in society. This goes on to demonstrate that for Africans, art is tied to some instrumental ends and does not just exist for its own sake.

4.2 Learning Outcomes

At the end of this study, learners should be able to:

1. Highlight and evaluate the outlook that art is instrumental in Fela; and
2. Evaluate the ideology of social change in Fela's notion of "Africanism" through art

4.3 Social Change and "Blackism"

Fela has demonstrated repeatedly that music, being a form of art can serve as a basis for social change. Fela Anikulapo Kuti was a Nigerian legendary musician, activist, social and politic critic who throughout his life sought the complete emancipation of Africa from colonial jaws. Fela was also critical of the

postcolonial governance both in Nigeria and other parts of Africa also stressing what he considers non-negotiable – Africa's unity, just like Kwame Nkrumah.

It needs to be stated categorically that Fela's 'Blackism' (also called Africanism) corresponds to the Black Power Movement in the United States of America. The Black Power Movement "took its genesis from the varieties of that African/Black nationalism tradition and the nationalist sentiment of the African (Black)-American community of the U.S. in the 20th century" (Botchway, 2014: 4).

Fela, from the 1970s, viewed the BPM as an embodiment of a grand idea and attitude he referred to as "Blackism" or "Africanism," although Fela did not originate the term. As early as 1965, Remi Fani-Kayode, a Nigerian lawyer, intellectual, and anti-colonialist, used the term Blackism and defined it in his booklet, *Blackism*, as a political concept "based on the fact that only Blackmen(women) can save the Blackman(woman) in the final analysis, and that a joint effort for the progress of the Blackman(woman) must be made together by all Blackmen(women) all over the world" (Fani-Kayode, 1965: 13). Fani-Kayode (1965: 34) asserted that the life blood of independent African states is unity and Blackism was "the spiritual inner force that must compel union; Blackism is the mental force that would ensure that Black progress must depend on Black strength and Black bargaining power with the white world."

Fela deemed Blackism/Africanism as a "Force of the Mind"—an intellectual awareness that advocated the promotion of Afrocentric ways of life as a strategy to globally liberate Blacks/Africans from all forms of mental enslavement induced by the slave trades and colonialism (Botchway, 2014: 8). It aimed to obliterate all forms of Black/African-on-Black/African oppression and all non-African cultural dominations that had aided neocolonialism in Africa. It meant to unite the international and continental Black/African community and instill in the

Black/African person a sense of possibility and sharp creative imagination and capacity anchored on an intellect or psychology of pride in their "Black/African" being, culture, and creativity (Botchway, 2014: 8).

Fela's notion of Blackism, which his musical career popularized, apparently shared the central ideas of unity, self-reliance, and cultural pride of Pan-Africanism with that of Fani-Kayode. From 1969 till his death in 1997, Fela became an uncompromising advocate of the BPM and endeavored to contextualize it in Africa. He made sense of its goals and promoted different shades of Black Power ideology through the popular art of music (Botchway, 2014: 8). Specifically, Blackism, emerged around 1977 and championed Pan-Africanism and Negritude, intellectual and cultural radicalism, physical militancy, research and participation in African indigenous spiritual beliefs and practices, and special rites of passage (Botchway, 2014: 23). Seeking the progress of Africa and her peoples in the diaspora, the movement aimed to reestablish pride in Black history and prevent all acts that tarnished the image of members of the Black/African nation. It also promoted the notion that Black consciousness and spirituality and an African personality were necessary tools to direct the Black/African mind and body toward Black realism and determinism (Botchway, 2014: 23).

One point is clear or evident in the exposition given to the main kernel of being black in Fela. The aim is to change the oppressor's outlook that being black does not make him or her a lesser human.

Self-Assessment Exercise

1. Another term for blackism is _____

2. Fela saw music as _____

4.4 Summary

The essence of this discussion has been to highlight how music in Fela is seen to possess an instrumental factor. It is not just about dance but as a means to see that social change and a better society is attained. With this, we come to the end of this module. Thank you for your attention and I believe you have learned a great deal up till now.

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4.6 Possible Answers to SAE

1. Africanism; 2. Weapon

End of Module Exercises

1. What is "the view that we must explain our thought and talk concerning normative matters – which involve many features that motivate realist views? (a) Autonomy (b) social cognitivism (c) imitationism (d) quasi-realism

2. Artworks among Africans is all about form (a) True (b) False

3. For traditional Africans that art must have a specific goal (a) True (b) False

4. What was considered as the mental force that would ensure that Black progress must depend on Black strength and Black bargaining power with the white world (a) Music (b) Blackism (c) Whitism (d) Redundancy

Module 3: Philosophy and Literature

Unit 1: Distinguishing Philosophy of Literature from Literature of Philosophy

Unit 2: Truth and Fiction in Literature: A Case Study of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*

Unit 3: The Symbolic and Categorical uses of "Black" and "White" for Humans

Unit 1: On Philosophy of Literature

1.1 Introduction

The essence of our discussion at this moment is to consider the idea of philosophy of literature. Dear students, in the units of this module, you will come to the realization or understanding that works of art in literary forms possess some philosophical truths. Are you ready to then understand the underlying character of philosophy of literature? Let us proceed!

1.2 Learning Outcomes

After exploring the present unit, learners will be able to:

1. Situate literature not only as a form of art but one that can be evaluated as an artwork; and
2. Identify and evaluate the unique features of philosophy of literature

1.3 The Subject Matter of Philosophy of Literature

Is it ever possible to see how philosophy can thrive without literature? This is almost impossible. Literature, irrespective of its genre as prose, poetry and drama has always featured one way or the other in the formulations of philosophy as far back as the ancient times. This is demonstrated in the *Sanskrit, Bible, Al-Qur'an, Bhagavad Gita, Laozi, Ifa,* to name a few. Strictly speaking, the philosophy of literature is a branch of aesthetics, the branch of philosophy that deals with the

question, “what is art”? Much of aesthetic philosophy has traditionally focused on the plastic arts or music, however, at the expense of the verbal arts. In fact, much traditional discussion of aesthetic philosophy seeks to establish criteria of artistic quality that are indifferent to the subject matter being depicted. Since all literary works, almost by definition, contain notional content, aesthetic theories that rely on purely formal qualities tend to overlook literature.

The very existence of narrative raises philosophical issues. In narrative, a creator can embody, and readers be led to imagine, fictional characters, and even fantastic creatures or technologies. The ability of the human mind to imagine, and even to experience empathy with, these fictional characters is itself revealing about the nature of the human mind. Some fiction can be thought of as a sort of a thought experiment in ethics: it describes fictional characters, their motives, their actions, and the consequences of their actions.

There are various works by philosophers that can be said to have been divulged through any of the genres of literature. Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Hesiod, Homer are some of the popular scholars in the West that have shown how philosophy can be mediated via literature.

Plato, for instance, believed that literary culture had a strong impact on the ethical outlook of its consumers. In *The Republic*, Plato displays a strong hostility to the contents of the culture of his period, and proposes a strong censorship of popular literature in his utopia.

More recently, however, philosophers of various stripes have taken different and less hostile approaches to literature. Since the work of the British Empiricists and Immanuel Kant in the late eighteenth century, Western philosophy has been preoccupied with a fundamental question of epistemology: the question

of the relationship between ideas in the human mind and the world existing outside the mind, if in fact such a world exists. In more recent years, these epistemological issues have turned instead to an extended discussion of words and meaning: can language in fact bridge the barrier between minds? This cluster of issues concerning the meaning of language and of "writings" sometimes goes by the name of *the linguistic turn*.

As such, techniques and tools developed for literary criticism and literary theory rose to greater prominence in Western philosophy of the late twentieth century. Philosophers of various stripes paid more attention to literature than their predecessors did. Some sought to examine the question of whether it was in fact truly possible to communicate using words, whether it was possible for an author's intended meaning to be communicated to a reader. Others sought to use literary works as examples of contemporary culture, and sought to reveal unconscious attitudes they felt present in these works for the purpose of social criticism.

Olusegun argues that both literature and philosophy are related on two general notes. He argues that they are both forms of "social consciousness and they are constructions of language" (Oladipo 1993, 1). The first level of their relationship is the fact that both literature and philosophy are social phenomena. According to Oladipo, they are social not just in the general sense of being produced by people who make up the society; rather they are social in majorly two ways (Oladipo 1993, 5):

> both philosophy and Literature are born out of human experiences of anindividual or groups and they often treat very abstract matters that arise from a reflective pondering on the phenomena of life. Both are products of culture. Again they are social in another expression. They are both produced for

> the intellectual and practical needs of the society.

From the points above, it is lucid that both disciplines focus on the same object which can be construed as the human person in the various aspects of his experience. They both reflect the quest for the better understanding and the tackling the problems of human existence. It is on this reminder that literature must necessarily be engaged as well as *philosophy*.

The second broad connection of the two disciplines in question is the idea that they are both constructions in language. Philosophy develops concepts and clarifies them, while literature engages these words to communicate ideas, figures and moral principles and to enlarge realities. Furthermore, another point that is crucial and allied to the above is the fact that both philosophy and literature mirror the society together with the society's development and state. The philosophy of an era tells of the nature of that age likewise the literature of an epoch tells of the problems and realities of that period. They both reflect the beliefs of men about realties. Philosophy is normative as regards the definition of philosophy above. Hence, through criticism of the ideas we live by, philosophy dishes out norms that should regulate the thinking and behaviour of men in the society (Staniland 2000, 3). In the same vein, literature has themes that convey morality pedagogically. For instance, Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* or the *Beautiful Ones are not yet Born* or Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and Jewel* or Shakespearean's *Hamlet.*

As a way of illustrating that literature is not always about fiction but hidden with some truths about society, humanity and the world, the next unit will focus on some literary works to deduce this understanding.

Self-Assessment Exercise

1. Who said philosophy is the criticism of ideas we live by (a) Owolabi (b) Staniland (c) Soyinka (d) Shakespeare

2. The meaning of language and of "writings" sometimes goes by the name of *the* _____

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1.6 Possible Answers to SAE

1. (b); 2. linguistic turn

Unit 2: Truth and Fiction in Literature: A Case Study of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*

2.1 Introduction

Dear students, you are welcome to another discussion on philosophy of arts and literature. Our agenda today is to use Orwell's *Animal Farm* to argue why literary works are not just fictions but in some cases pregnant with meaning for social change. Let us now commence.

2.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, the students would have been able to:

1. Identify at least one literary work with implications for social change; and
2. Evaluate and react to the outlook that literary works are necessary fictions

2.3 Socio-Political Thoughts in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*

African socio-political writers and ideological banks, tainted by Popperian ideology hold dear to the 'Piecemeal Social Engineering' (liberalism and democracy as opposed to totalitarianism) as a panacea to Africa's problems. This breeds a sharp conflict between them and Marxian ideological scholars on the continent who subscribe to a politico-economic overhauling, what Popper (1945) calls 'Utopian Social Engineering.' In this regard, this essay focuses on the need to caution the Marxian approach to social change which is both utopian and violence. Rather than exploring the violent approach, the piecemeal may be observed since the original intent of some of these marxists are not even readily known to the masses. At this juncture, drawing parallels with the theme of Orwell's *Animal Farm* becomes crucial.

In the aftermath of the ‘revolution’ at Manor Farm and the succession to the ‘power hierarchy’ by the pigs, later headed by *Napoleon,* one would inquire into the lot of the other animals whose rational capacity seems to be on holiday. This is a case to ponder over in George Orwell’s *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story.* Much as deception was very easy to attain after the aphorism: “four legs good, two legs bad” migrated into “four legs good, two legs better”, the reader is left to wonder why the other animals were so daffy (Orwell, 1946). Even when *Clover* seems to recall the initial cliché, she could not trust her memory. I think the only *Socrates* in that insightful work is *Old Benjamin*. Perhaps, he must have heard about the Athenian *Socrates,* so kept his thoughts to himself to avoid the hemlock. You will need to congratulate *Squealer*, whom I dub the minister of information. He committed several fallacies and proposed seemingly convincing arguments but the poor minds of the other animals would not decipher. *Napoleon* and his arch-rival *Snowball* made the early parts of the novel interesting. But the other players, constituted by the porous and fickle-minded animals were not only confused but lacked the intellectual will to comprehend the status quo clearer. Their minds are far from being roused!

In Orwell’s analysis, the Marxists are the pigs; the masses constitute the animals, save for the dogs who are the ‘armed forces.’ It does not require elaboration that the ruling class or the oppressor, are the humans. From this, I will proceed to analyse the concept of change from the Marxists that needs to be watched.

There are other farms aside Manor in Orwell’s classic. Manor Farm is owned by Jones, the perceived oppressor who mirrors as the ruling class. Jones and everything that stands for humans in the novel was perceived as both ruling class and oppressor within and outside Manor farm. It is up to the pigs to then initiate the class distinction albeit implicitly. The animals all suspect something was

wrong but they could not actually pin what is amiss. Marxists usually have the source of their ideology. The ideology from this source, they respect and perceive to be very correct about the past, present and the future. Old Major, the oldest pig depicts the real Karl Marx since he set out the class distinction to the understanding of the animals and hoped for the day when the beasts of England will prevail of humans. This is actually Marxists' admission that the present status quo will soon be overturned against the ruling class for the benefit of common people. Old Major's speech continues to motivate the animals. Throughout the novel, it seems this speech is the only idea the animals understood but lacked the will and resolve to lead, hence the mantle passed to the pigs.

The revolution was bloody but all the promises made to the animals soon started to dwindle and shrink especially when the 'dogs,' the armed forces entered the fray. Napoleon who was seen as a friend and leader soon assumed powers that become questionable only at the price of the dogs' bite. Soon, with the use of rhetorics, the commandments of *Animalism* were fritted away on private gains. It is within this spectrum that Africans must be careful of Marxists in Africa. At this juncture however, I must stress a point. Marxism as an ideology is not entirely bad in itself. Just like democracy is not entirely bad in itself, Popper says: "It rests with us to improve matters. The democratic institutions cannot improve themselves. The problem of improving themselves is always a problem of *persons* rather than for institutions. But if we want improvements, we must make clear which *institutions* we want to improve" (Popper, 1966: 127). This line of thinking can also be brought into Marxism in Africa. The ideology is not bad in itself. It is however important to look at the problem of persons who take the mantle of leadership and inquire if these people will not actually end up dining with the common enemy. This is the *cautious* question that should be burning in the minds of Africans

There have been reported cases of labour union representatives who agitate for the welfare of the masses to the ruling class and seeking to strike a balance of equity. Most of these union leaders are immersed in the Marxists ideology of class and struggles of the classes. They are usually Marxists with the deep passion that the socialist system will in a short while upturn the status quo. This is keeping in line with *Theses on Feuerbach* where Karl Marx announces that "philosophers have interpreted the world in various ways, the point however, is to change it" (Marx, 1972:220). So this is where I have a problem and caution the masses to be wary of Marxists.

The passion to change and engineer society is worthy. However, the violent approach which Popper cautions is a step taken too far. It is my agreement with Popper, and for the awareness of the public that no blood of any citizen be sacrificed for social changes that could have taken a peaceful and non-violent route. While seeking the easiest route to social change, Popper advocates for the piece-meal and peaceful alternative democracy. Democracy is much better than the kind of tyranny that the Marxists approach as illustrated with *Animal Farm* may lead to. Hence for Popper: "the difference between a democracy and a tyranny is that under a democracy the government can be got rid of without bloodshed; under a tyranny it cannot" (Popper, 1963). On democracy, Popper explains that it "provides the institutional framework for the reform of political institutions. It makes possible reform of institutions without using violence, and thereby the use of reason in the designing of new institutions and the adjusting of old ones" (Popper, 1966: 126). This is the caution for the masses to be wary of Marxists in Africa who uphold the principle of change via violence and bloodshed as though there are no other plausible means to explore.

Self-Assessment Exercise

1. Who wrote *Animal Farm*? (a) George Boole (b) George Orwell (c) George Washington (d) George Moore

2. Animal Farm is necessarily a work of fiction without social implications (a) No (b) Yes

2.4 Summary

In this unit, we have talked about the ways that *Animal Farm* can serve as a lesson for those who are bent on using Marxist violent ideology as a means for social change in Africa. The work, though a literary work cautions against the excessive reliance on literary work as merely fiction but capable of assisting us to see better the veils of ideological battles in the society.

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2.6 Possible Answers to SAE

1. (b); 2. (a)

Unit 3: Racism in Classical Literature

3.1 Introduction

Dear students, today we are going to bring this series of interaction on this course PHL323 – Philosophy of Arts and Literature to a close. I will be introducing you to an important issue of racism that you may have been taking for granted both in history and in literature. You will be made to understand that the use of white and black to categorize people is not a recent development but an affair that goes far into history and also expressed in works like William Shakespear's *Othello*.

3.2 Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit, the students must have been able to:

Identify at least two uses of the colours: "black" and "white" for referring to people

Identify how racism occurs in at least two classical literature

3.3 Racism and Colour Politics in Classical Literature

Two crucial issues will be explored within the context of this inquiry. The first is to ask if the colour 'black' we used by Africans for themselves or not. The second to show that the colour category carries a deluge of misrepresented and demeaning flavours, all of which seek to diminish the fame and prowess of Africans.

It is therefore pertinent to admit first of all that the 'black' has been in use since classical times as a connotation for dark deeds, evil, sorrow, death, the underworld, deities with bad characters and it was used to personify "Kip" the goddess of death (Price 1883: 1). This is a fact that has also been affirmed by historian Frank Snowden (1983). The Greek word for 'black' which is "melas" is definitely used for things negative and derogatory (Chimakonam, 2018a/b); (Tsri, 2016a/b). On the other hand, the concept, 'white' which is "leukos" expresses or symbolises the expression of light and life (Price, 1883: 1). White discerns all things positive, cheerful and superior. Tsri (2016b) makes a historical examination of the symbolic notions of each of 'white' and 'black' only to arrive at the conclusion that the colour 'white' signifies superiority, moral excellence, etc., and the colour 'black' used in categorising the African stock signifies that which is demonic, evil, savage, barbaric and morally inferior. It is from this symbolic use of the terms that the one was ascribed on black Africans when the other was reserved for the European stock. According to Tsri (2016: 148) "available historical evidence shows that the ancient Greeks used both the terms Ethiopians and black interchangeably for Africans." It is also instructive to state that the term 'Ethiopian' which translates literally as "burnt face" or "sun-burnt-face" to categorise black Africans may be traced to the Greek poet Homer (Snowden, 1971); (Hannaford, 1996); (Thompson, 1989). It is also true that "by the time of Xenophanes (570-480 B.C.E), Ethiopians were identified a bit more precisely as black with Negroid flat noses and woolly hair" just as "fifth century B.C.E literature located Ethiopians in the vague hinterland called Africa" (Hood, 1994: 36). When and how then did it become dominant, the use of the concept 'black' for Africans? This is one of the core contentions of Kwesi Tsri (2016a: 148) who informs that:

> As early as their initial encounter with Africans, the ancient Greeks, followed by the Romans, conceived of and differentiated Africans, not on the basis of culture, language or self-ascribed identities, but instead on the basis of the perceived colour of their skin and other physical features. The Greco-Roman knowledge of Africans was considerably enlarged through detailed descriptions of their skin colour and other physical characteristics and this resulted in the creation of particular images of Africans which in turn differentiated them from other non-Greeks and non-Romans. Henceforth, the terms

> ‘Ethiopians’, ‘black’ and their related created concepts became the framework through which Africans were conceived of and depicted.

What we have been able to do thus far is to show that there is a connection between the symbolic and categorical understandings of these concepts. It is also clear that the former fuels the latter. Consequent of the interchangeable use of ‘black’ for native Africans, “a link was established between the humanity and cultures of Africans and the negative symbolisms that the term ‘black’ evoked” (Tsri, 2016a: 148). The consequences of this linkage are grave since all the negative symbolisms of the term ‘black’ was exported to the native African. Several literatures soon sprung to justify this. The symbolic connotation of black to categorise Africans found Africans being described as savages with natural tendency to evil, harbingers of bad luck and disaster (Bernal, 1987); (Snowden, 1971); Tsri (2016a/b); Chimakonam (2018). Similarly, Benjamin Isaac (2004) refers to Aristotle who makes the analogy that in the same way that the heat of the sun shrinks a piece of wood, the body and nature of Africans are affected by the heat of the sun. the end result of the symbolic and categorical use of ‘black’ for Africans is their depiction as inferior to those passed as ‘white.’

It is however unfortunate that this approach to seeing people from the yardstick of colour soon entered classical works, including the Christian Bible.

Being black is an existential dread it needs to be said. Aside the horrors and history associated with slavery and colonization, which peoples of African descent have had to endure, being a “Negro” has an unenviable place in most parts of the world where a person may be a victim of homicide in some parts of the United State. All things negative and evil are ascribed to persons of African descent simply because of their skin colour and this has informed the justification of colonization as an effort in civilization. Speaking on this subject of colonization right inside Africa, Frantz Fanon (37) harps:

> The town belonging to the colonized people, or at least the native town, the Negro village, the medina, the reservation, is a place of ill fame, peopled by men of evil repute. They are born there, it matters little where or how; they die there; it matters not

> where, nor how. It is a world without spaciousness; men live there on top of each other, and their huts are built one on top of the other…The native town is a crouching village, a town on its knees, a town wallowing in the mire. It is a town of niggers and dirty Arabs. The look that the native turns on the settler's town is a look of lust, a look of envy; it expresses his dreams of possession—all manner of possession: to sit at the settler's table, to sleep in the settler's bed, with his wife if possible.

Fanon's analysis of the colonial condition of Africans is not divorceable from the earlier perception that persons who are deemed black as lesser humans. If this were not the case, the great German and highly respected scholar on history and philosophy Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1975, 177) would not have concluded that African "is an example of animal in all his savagery and lawlessness." The depiction of the African in a negative and evil light is not something new or commences with Hegel. It expresses itself even in the Christian tradition which was transported into Africa, to win "souls" [of those who were initially deemed to possess no soul] for God. What then is the view of the Bible and Church tradition on the colour black and its symbolic referent to Africans?

To answer the foregoing, perhaps it is suitable to admit that the Bible has been adduced as God's revelation unto humankind to serve as a torch which shines back and forth. Specifically, it was perceived by Apostle Paul as the inspiration of God for teaching and instruction. In his letter to Apostle Timothy (2nd Tim 2: 16), Apostle Paul did not mince words: "All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." The logical implication is that the Bible was inspired by God for the good of human kind. As kind and straightforward as these words sound to the ears, little has been said concerning some of the passages that were 'inspired' to connote or depict black Africans as lesser humans. In this short illumination, I will introduce some passages of the Christian Bible, scriptural verses that according to Apostle Paul are inspired by God for teaching and instruction. I will also illustrate how Church traditions treated and depicted people of black skin. I then leave the reader with some random comments to muse over as leisure.

In the Old Testament portion of the Bible, a reference is made regarding the skin of an Ethiopian African through the divine inspiration of Prophet Jeremiah thus: "can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Neither can you do good, who are accustomed to doing evil" (Jer. 13: 23). In this sense, Ethiopian's skin is calculated to be a symbol of sin – a naturally sinful nature it seems – and such a nature it seems, unchangeable!

Centuries before Prophet Jeremiah was inspired, another passage detests the marriage of Ethiopians. In Numbers (12: 1): "Mariam and Aaron began to speak against Moses because of his Ethiopian[1] wife, for he had married an Ethiopian." An African Christian who seeks to emerge from the inferiority complex, discrimination and stigmatization s/he suffers from non-Africans both within the continent and without may discern that biblical passages (such as this), attest to the long tradition of such denigration of the African progenitors (Ofuasia 2019). To reinforce the extent of my claim, I cite some instances from Church fathers and Church traditions.

The use of the term 'black' to signify Satan is well documented in the *Epistle of Barnabas,*[2] where Satan is referred to as the Black One. It no longer requires critical reflection why all things negative, dehumanising, Satanic and Devilish have become synonymous with black Africans. In another early Christian text titled *Life of Melanie the Young,* as reported by Kwesi Tsri (2016, 148), the Devil transformed into a "young black man and was misleading Christian women." This early Church text and some other texts and traditions seem to establish the understanding that to have a black skin is to lead a sinful nature incorrigibly. Validating this locus, Father Origen had once proclaimed: "At

[1]Other translations may use the word Kush, an area that represents the Upper Nile in African geography. It is another name for the black Africans aboriginal to this region.

[2]This Epistle, is not among the books recognized by the Church. It is however important to realize that the 'inspiration' or basis for this rejection is questionable especially when we recall that the some of the texts of the Dead Sea Scrolls could have made the list. This is further compounded by the lack of an objective criterion for how the Present Bible arrived at 66 books leaving the pseudepigrapha and Apocrypha. Granted all scripture are inspired, it is doubtful whether or not the inspiration for 66 books is indeed Celestial. Further blows to the taxonomy endure when one recalls that only the Church admits (perhaps out of its conviction) the Apocrypha when other Christian denominations do not. The question of what is inspired and to be taught for the 'Celestial Ticket' is therefore circumspect. Personally, I admit all these works since they are concerned about the same thematic contentions and provide better and broader views regarding Judeo-Christian beliefs and practices.

one time we were *Ethiopians (Aethiopes)* in our vices and sins. How so? Because our sins had *blackened* us" (see Tsri 2016, 149).

Father Jerome who was also a Christian exegete refers to black African peoples as "black and cloaked in filth of sin." All these illustrations have led the Ghanaian scholar Kwesi Tsri (2016, 149) to infer that "the available evidence from the early Christian literature shows that the early Christian exegetes did not only describe and categorise Africans as black, but they also found it appropriate to present them as black in a symbolic sense. They considered the colour black and the term 'Ethiopian' as synonyms, and used both as religious terms for demons, evil, sin and carnal lust."

At this juncture, some critics may interject! They may counter my position by advancing that the passages of the Christian Bible and Church traditions that I have cited seem to vitiate or downplay the African are both false and misleading. They may offer verses that put the African in a positive light. This is the case since there are other passages that show that black Africans are also created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1: 26-7) as well as Apostle Paul's emphasis that there is no distinction between Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 10:12). Another point of counter may be roused concerning inspiration. It could be advanced that scripture could have been inspired, human languages and the problems of transliteration from one language to the other could account for the distortion of the original inspiration and revelation. These even when they seem valid are both trivial and lack substance to the discourse at hand. In the paragraph that follows, I summarily show that these prongs, if followed to the logical conclusion merely strengthen my position.

For the first counter, I tender that the image and the likeness of God is disputable since being black is to be evil, grimy and Devilish when being white is to be good, pure and Godly. This discolor distinction is reinforced by the location of Devil as black and God with His angels as white. If humans are made in the image and likeness of God, then this excludes black humans, for they are modeled after the Devil obviously. For the second objection, the non-distinction between Jews and Gentiles assumes that black non-Christian Africans falls into the cadre of the word 'Gentile.' The word 'Gentile'

according to *The New Webster's Dictionary of the English Language,* means "non-Jew" or "Christian." People who hold dear to Apostle Paul's rendition in Romans 10: 12 fail to understand that one needs to first be a Christian before the 'non-distinction condition' takes effect. On the other hand however, the distinction, denigration and discrimination of non-Christian Africans may persist. In other words, you need to be a Christian before you can be 'matriculated' into the 'White Humanity.' For the third, I agree that the process of transliteration could have diminished original inspiration. Again, this reinforces my thrust. The logical implication is that the inspiration is not perfect after all. And this imperfection does no good to the plight of the African. I therefore tender the need for Africans themselves to realize that the Bible is obviously, neither inspired nor written for them!

Owing to the line of thought entertained thus far, perhaps, there are ways one may weave around these "heresies" that I have roused. One is to denounce them as outright fabrications lacking basis. Perhaps they are invoked to malign the Bible – God's awesome revelation! Another is to consider these words deeply to see if they portray black Africans as creatures in the proclaimed image and likeness of God as the book of Genesis hints or Devil's people that need to be inducted into the image of God via the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. A further proposal is to attack the author of this short meme. Please feel free to do this with your hard-nosed critical scrutiny so I may know where I may have reasoned wrongly. While you do so, be guided that in any discourse, the merest hint of dogmatic certainty as to finality of statement is an exhibition of folly.

Be that as it may, the Bible and Church are not the only items used to symbolize Africans as blacks and necessary evil needing salvation. The highly respected literary personae William Shakespeare is also guilty of this charge. In other words, the use of the history of colour in ways that does not favour Africans can also be found in *literary works* as well.

The description of Africans in classical antiquity and the Middle Ages soon infiltrated early modern fiction. In William Shakespeare's play, *Othello,* Tsri (2016, 149) finds that

Shakespeare expresses the bias of his time toward the concept 'black.' In his words: "…the depiction of Othello as black results in other characters establishing an essential link between his humanity and moral and religious evils." Tsri (2016, 150) furthers that "…Shakespeare writes in a language in which the use of 'black' to both symbolise evil and to categorise people constitutes a deep conceptual structure that pre-exists any purpose he might use it for."

Hence, while "…Othello was presented in the play as evil, demonic, barbarous, savage and all that is negative due to the colour of his skin, Desdemona was presented as good, heavenly, civilised and all that is positive due to the colour of her skin" (Chimakonam 2018, 3). This negative profiling of Othello based on his skin is rendered clearer in Iago's proclamation to Brabantio in Act 1 Scene 1 of the work thus: "Even now, now, very now, an old black ram is tupping your white ewe. Arise, arise, Awake the snorting citizens with the bell Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you. Arise I say." To have a black skin amounts to being a devil, obviously!

Tsri (2016, 150) argues that from the foregoing analysis, "black" as a synonym for Africans was not a self-acclaimed term but an imposition by Europeans. Africans have their original names that identify them with their geography and cultural statuses (Lake 2003, 1). This outlook is also shared by Cheikh Anta Diop (1987, 13) who relays that the "in antiquity, the Ethiopians call themselves *autochthon*, those who had sprung from the ground." If Africans have the names they called themselves, why use black, negro and the symbolism associated with this colour to refer to them?

Self-Assessment Exercise

1. Tsri argues that, "black" as a synonym for Africans was not a self-acclaimed term but an imposition by _____. (a) Europeans (b) Asians (c) Americans (d) Nords

2. Who said the African "is an example of animal in all his savagery and lawlessness"? (a) Tsri (b) Shakespeare (c) Kant (d) Hegel

3.4 Summary

In this discussion, we have been able to show that there are ways that literature has served as a vehicle for passing negative symbols of colour against Africans. From what we have engaged in this unit, there is no doubt any longer that works of literature are merely fictions without any implications for social truth. With this we now bring the entire course to a close. Thank you for your attention and time.

3.5 References/Further Readings/Web Sources

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3.6 Possible Answers to SAE

1. (a); 2. (d)

End of Module Exercises

1. In his book, entitled _____, Plato displays a strong hostility to the contents of the culture of his period, and proposes a strong censorship of popular literature in his utopia.

2. Who made the announcement: "philosophers have interpreted the world in various ways, the point however, is to change it" (a) Marx (b) Feuerbach (c) Engels (d) Hegel

3. It has been found that _____writes in a language in which the use of 'black' to both symbolise evil and to categorise people constitutes a deep conceptual structure that pre-exists any purpose he might use it for (a) Orwell (b) Shakesphere (c) Marx (d) Tsri