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“The Challenges of Super-maxim to Judgment and Actions”.

Address of Welcome By

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I welcome you heartily to the general meeting and conference of the Nigerian Philosophical Association (NPA) to the theme “Personhood and Personal Identity”. I recognize the eminent physical presence of all dignitaries who have honoured our invitation. Your coming fills us with joy and gratitude. We were told by the leadership of the association that about 1000 scholars from different universities, institutions and shades of ideas are expected at this conference. You will definitely be satisfied to note that, we have made provisions for over 2000. Calabar has the flair of attracting huge numbers, not minding the fact that she is situated almost at end of the world. Now that you are with us, you deserve the best, and we have made adequate arrangements for you comfort. We thank the Vice-chancellor Prof. Bassey O. Asuquo, and his team, who have been very generous to our preparations. I thank the local organizing committee that has labored untiringly to see that everything goes well. Examinations are still on and many of our students have braved all odds to be here present. I thank them and indeed the great Malabites and Malabresses. There are clear indications that NPA keeps growing stronger as is evidenced by her continued capacity to organize interesting conferences with very captivating themes. This can only be attributed to the efforts of a capable and committed leadership, and of course, of a responsive followership. I salute and thank the leadership of NPA for their dogged efforts to ensure that the association stays on course. Let us all continue to contribute our little quota in ensuring that the association keeps waxing stronger. Members of this university have always supported the progress and flourishing of this association and have often played their expected modest roles well in steering her to glorious and enviable heights. They have participated at her various functions at other universities, presented papers, and once, even the lead-paper. We are indeed very happy to return the generosity of our colleagues at these other host universities.

As philosophers, we are duty bound to harness clues towards confronting some of the teething problems of our time yearning for solution. Philosophy as a science of essence, in its most dynamic self-expression, is about raising personal insightful questions, seeking credible answers and readjusting answers to new insights and thereby guarding against the insinuations of unintended ethnocentric commitment. Fortunately, the themes of this year's conference are capable of stimulating philosophical reflection beyond such insinuations. I welcome you, not merely as the Dean of the Faculty of Arts of this University, and Co-Chief-Host of this occasion, but more so, as one of you. This naturally, has implications for the character of my address. I very much crave your indulgence to make some remarks beyond the usual scope of a welcome address. This is a remark concerning an aspect of the major thematic that has attracted my attention. I shall do this cognizant of a philosophical current sweeping through the University of Calabar at the moment i.e. *Complementary Reflection*. My major concern shall be **“The Challenges of Super-maxim to Judgment and Actions”.**

One of the major problems that confront us today as individuals and groups is that relating to failed judgments and inappropriate actions. The capacities to will appropriately, judge, distinctly and clearly, and take firm and free compassionate decisions are some of the major characteristics that distinguish the

personhood of our being, and set us apart, from those of other lower object. Remove this dimension completely, or have it impaired, and the human person easily becomes very unpredictable, and indeed a compromised disposable object among others. I make this observation bearing in mind some of the questions that agitate our minds as to the reason(s) for the many avoidable failed policies, unacceptable leadership styles, and overall incapacity for effective social engineering commensurate to the type resources at our disposal. We experience daily, often to our greatest anguish and disgust, how vast opportunities for meaningful and constructive development keep slipping through our hands and are often wasted, **and our apparent good intentions notwithstanding**. The seeming illusory and hallucinatory measures accompanying some of our major decisions and actions call for a thorough reexamination of a **super-maxim** that I have identified, which has the capacity to grossly influence and even impair our judgments, choices and actions. Under the influence of this super-maxim, **actors in clear insight, but in implicit ignorance follow those dictates that contradict their initial intentions and consider this the wisest thing to do**. This is what I call *the paradox of human ambivalent situation*. In most contentious situations of life that require clear and distinct judgment, firm decision and well mapped out course of action, we often find ourselves in this ugly situation, where we insist on doing those things we condemn and reject as undesirable, wrong and even evil; indeed often those things we hold as objectionable, are precisely the things we often do. It is a situation where we **insightfully but ignorantly** choose those things that can even work against our most cherished personal interests. The question then arises, why is it that in many contentious situations of life, we act in this dubious manner and consider this the wisest things to do? One thing is obvious; we are dealing here with a case of self-deceit or deceit. If now we thereby deceive ourselves, or are so deceived by some external forces, the questions then arise: Are we the person(s) we think we are? Again, what meaning do expressions such as “self-conscious”, “responsible and rational actions” convey? What is remarkable in such paradoxical situations, is that we choose a course of action often joyfully and are fully committed to it, this notwithstanding, we keep complaining about the uncomfortable consequences of the same action. Does it then not occur to us that we are often architects of our own misfortune, quite often without fully realising this? This ignorance is heightened because we often elevate a super-maxim of a very radical nature to a methodological principle of action. Descartes once spotted a problem of this kind as is captured in his methodic doubt. He articulated it more as a thorough-going epistemological problem. However, the problem has a deeply ontological dimension with far reaching implications for the whole of our personhood.

To start with, what is a super-maxim? It is a law-like dictate, which is anchored on our fundamental natural instinct of self-preservation, following which clear and distinct judgment, committed unbiased action, over matters become difficult if not impossible. It is such a dictate that fundamentally controls our actions such that we mistake their hypothetical character for a universal imperative. Within the context of complementary reflection I have reduced all maxims relating to the realisation of our interests to **one super-maxim** of the facultative injunction: **The Nearer the Better and the Safer**. That is to say, the nearer or more intimate a thing is to me, the better and safer I adjudge its being. We can still reformulate it descriptively and negatively thus: *The more removed a thing is from our intimate region of belongingness, our immediate neighborhood, our ethnic, clannish and tribal world of reference, for example, the less are we obliged to it and the more can we exploit it freely with impunity for our own survival, and in this case even without remorse*. We expound the super-maxim further with injunctions of this kind taken from Igbo language: "zugbuokwa ndi ahia" (cheat the market people or bargain well). Again, "anagi ere okuko ukwu jiri n' ulo" (it is not allowed or wise to sell a deformed chicken within the immediate neighborhood, sell it to strangers). We often exhort our relatives going to market to act in this fashion, as farewell words, considering this the wisest thing to do.

I call this a super-maxim and not an ordinary maxim because of its fundamental nature, and the concealed challenges it places on our judgment, willing and action, and indeed on the totality of our being. Following this super-maxim is something deeply entrenched in our subconscious and has to do with our natural primitive instinct to survive at the cost of others. Here, our primitive natural instinct of self-preservation instigates us to share our interests only with those who can guarantee our survival most and these, we assume, are those nearest to us whom we instinctively adjudge better and safer. Now, it is really sensible

or a matter of common sense to assume that those nearest to us are safer and better (our kith and kin, those from our tribe, from our clan, from our ethnic group, our sex, our race, from our political parties, in short those nearest to us.) The question is: Is it rational also to so assume and so act? Hardly though, unfortunately and tragically, we often find ourselves elevating maxims of this kind, though ignorantly, which have limited range of applicability, to operative laws guiding our action and insist on their thoroughgoing binding and rational nature. The consequences of acting in this **non-law guided mode** are enormous. To start with, an assumption of this kind has an inherent dimension of self-imposed exclusiveness which negates the basic principle of mutual complementary relationship needed for any system to survive and uphold its being and legitimacy. Here, we have to remember that, within a system of mutual dependent units, what actors undertake to realize their goals in the exclusion of the interests of any of the units constituting the system is commensurate to what it takes to make realization of the goals of any of the units, including those of the actors themselves, difficult if not impossible. We say this bearing in mind that within such a system *anything that exists serves a missing link of reality* such that all the units are inherently dependent on each other to have their goals realized and upheld. In other words, within a system of mutual dependent units, the moment actors throw caution to the winds and pursue their actions in exclusion of the interests of those of other units, an **ontological boomerang effect** immediately sets in. This ontological boomerang effect is captured by the Igbo adage: *egbe bere ugo bere nke si ibe ya ebena nku kwaa ya* (let the kite perch, let the eagle perch, whichever denies the other the same rights let its wings break). In most contentious situations, our actions are threatened by this ontological boomerang effect because they are designed to hinder others from realizing their goals and thereby making realization, even of our own goals difficult, if not impossible. If we watch out closely, we notice that most matters that have to deal with the common good are beclouded with super-maxims of aforementioned type. In these instances, and in many other contentious situations, that demand clearer and better insight, more balanced judgment, more responsive answers and alternatives, many of us assume that “the nearer the better and the safer”, i.e., we assume that those from our local governments, those from our states, and those from our churches are safest and that they are better, just because they are nearer. We are often more likely to entrust contracts and responsibilities to them, overlook their deficiencies and trust them most. In the same way, we assume that they are better teachers, better students, better administrators of the common good, better doctors, better, and safer politicians capable of managing our affairs better, just because they are nearer, we assume also that they are better and safer. How wrong we can be. Are we then surprised at the rate of failed expectations, failed projects and decay in our system? Although hypothetical we assume that such are imperatives of a universal kind and treat them as such.

The task then arises how to reverse this trend of consistent commitment to super-maxims and in a way that the subject starts acting rational on a higher plane (Redefining Ethnicity, 76-78). One of the major foci of complementary reflection is to highlight the ambivalent character of human existential situations, which has the capacity to becloud our judgment. Again, it seeks to expose that dimension of a super-maxim, which can intensify this ambivalence; a dimension that can set units against each other and in a way that makes them see themselves as contradictory opposites in total negation of their inherent capacity to mutual complementary codetermination. By so doing, complementary reflection seeks to free the ego from self-imposed constraints and such that make the ego act against the dictates of its own laws, even to the point of self-contradiction. To achieve this objective, complementary reflection seeks to place at the disposal of the ego tools and mechanisms needed to convert all shades of super-maxims, with limited range of applicability, to universal imperatives, **which are not categorical in character, as against imperatives of a deontological nature e.g. the Categorical Imperative of Kant (Ibuaru, 210-221)**. The processes needed to achieve this are twofold: First, we evolve principles and an imperative akin to the enormity of the challenges presented by human ambivalent situation (Method and Principles 277-440). Second, we embark on a **noetic propaedeutic** which is inspired and animated by the principles and imperative of complementary reflection. (Ibuanidanda, 312-376). The major target of this form of propaedeutic is to regain the true personhood of the ego from the difficulties posed by its tension laden ambivalent existential situation. This we accomplish in the process of what I call "existential conversion of super-maxim into general or universal law" during which the ego learns to act insightfully in full integration of **the**

transcendent categories of unity of consciousness (called **akara obi** in Igbo language), into its action. In this process, actors learn to appreciate the demands of the **universal and non-categorical imperative** of complementary reflection which states: **Allow the limitations of being to be the cause of your joy.** Universal and non-categorical imperatives of this kind enjoy the character of necessity, which can only be regained indirectly by reason of commitment to the insight that *being is that on account of which anything that exists serves a all missing link of reality* . In other words, to be is to be in mutual complementary relationship with all existent realities. This is what we mean when we affirm: *Ibuanyidanda* or *ka so mu adina*. In this case, the negation of being is not **nothingness** but *ka so mu di* (that I may be alone). This immediately reveals the enormous ontological implications of the problematic: Quite unlike Descartes who saw the question of self-doubt as something that is closely linked to epistemology, complementary reflection never ceases to emphasise the far-reaching ontological ramifications of the matter. Within this context, true and authentic personhood subsists in all it takes **to be** such that to be is **being-in-control** of our tension-laden existential situations, as to master the super-maxim, with its limited range of applicability. Thus, to be or the beingness of our personhood, in the sense of **being--in-control** or *ima-onwe-onye*, supersedes acting merely out of common sense, but translates to acting rational on a higher plane in a self-conscious, rational and compassionate manner.

I am quite certain that this conference shall yield a huge harvest of fresh and viable ideas as has always characterized conferences of this nature organized by NPA, most especially under the leadership of our highly esteemed Rev. Fr. Prof. Oguejiofor Obi Josephat, the incumbent president, . We have quite a wide variety of sub-themes hanging around the major thematic and this gives us very good opportunity to express our personal views, beyond unintended philosophic commitment, a setback that has often militated against insightful reflection in philosophy.

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