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Essays on Complementary Reflection  
by  
Okpabi Emmanuel

Posted on the internet on March 3, 2005

Complementary reflection is a form of thinking that is holistic, comprehensive, unified and trans-historical in orientation. As a form of thinking, complementary reflection as normative and practical form of reason appraises reality as a complex, unified whole, yet taking into cognizance the proper individual status of all missing links of reality.

As a philosophy, complementary reflection recognizes the relativity of things in the world but it is a form of reasoning that refuses to stress and extol relativity to the extreme such as to culminate in creating barriers which come as a result of exclusive absolutism and extreme individualism.

Complementary reflection is a thinking process in which the human mind seeks to transcend all forms of artificial divides and rejectionist trends and by so doing reaches out to a new plane of consciousness. Here the whole of existence is perceived as being complementary, total, unified, absolute comprehensive and future referential in character. It is an accommodative form of thinking that acknowledges the fact that we have fragmented moments of historical existence but that as fragmented moments of existence we have our past, present and future which must be geared towards a harmonious and unified whole. It is a philosophy that emphasizes the need for the conceptual destruction of those things that make for disunity and disaffection in our world.

As a philosophy of integration and social progress, complementary reflection is outstanding and rewarding. Complementary reflections as a philosophy is not exotic, hypocritical or exaggerative. It tries to come to terms with our human real-life and existential ambivalent situations which have undeniable ability to influence human actions both individually and collectively. In such situations, our interests as human beings, which are of double capacity play a vital role. Here, complementary reflection points out that there are some innate or inborn tendencies of man which in asymmetrical existential situations can lead to actions that are on the long run self-destructive. Complementary philosophy offers a new form of consciousness that makes us understand better our nature and that of our situations. Man Aristotle says should know himself. It is true that a problem identified is half solved. It is also believed that ideas rule the world. Ideas change the world. Complementarity helps us transform ideas to action. In this form it helps us to transcend the realm of conception of ideas and come to the realm of existential application and practicality. Because complementary reflection offers a holistic, universal and future referential framework for understanding situations, it is a progress seeking philosophy.

As a philosophy, complementary reflection emphasizes equality of human beings, and relevance of all beings to all beings. It advocates the relinquishing of some cherished values for the very purpose of integration.

As a philosophy that fundamentally looks at reality from a universal, total and comprehensive point of view, complementarity advocates that limitations of our being are not negations in themselves as such they can form the basis for self-actualisation. It views it that all individuals being integral parts of a whole must always define their interests within the framework of the common good. That the success of the one is the success of the whole and the failure of a part is the failure of the whole. Within this complementary and

inter-dependent framework, competition, self-projection, and self-imposition is discouraged. It offers a rational scheme for people while upholding their fragmented existence, to get committed on the highest scale to the collective and general interest on a universal scale. By so doing, complementarity advocates and enhances integration.

Complementary reflection on a comprehensive and all inclusive scale transcends cultural divides, religious and ethnic differences, individuality and exclusive self-preservation tendencies. It thus projects and leads to a transcendent complementary unity of consciousness that creates a mental global village. It tries to create and articulate a universal, total, comprehensive and a proleptic self without undermining the importance and inalienable status of the relative individuals (missing links) without which the universal whole must cease to exist as a whole.

It must be noted that it is only on a high level comprehensiveness that complementary reflection will yield complete and total results of integration and social progress. This is so because for there to be a progress that is total with practical bearing on all facets of human life and the society, no individual or group must think itself as absolute.

Conclusively, complementary reflection is a philosophy behind the positive ideals of globalization – international and intercontinental co-operation. It is the idea behind such social activities as sports or games, on the local, national and international scale.

It is the philosophy whose proper articulation and implementation will result in unfathomable integration and social progress.

### **Global Paradox and Complementary Reflection**

When we talk of a paradox, we refer to situations that have the semblance of contradiction. Global paradox from a complementary point of view connotes the fact that in every human being, and in fact, in relation to all living organisms there is the natural intrinsic survival instinct which is in harmony or accordance with the law of self-preservation. Irrespective of tribe, religion, race, sex, or geopolitical setup, man seeks to do everything possible to ensure his continued existence.

In seeking to preserve themselves, there is often a puzzle among human beings. Here people often tend to act and behave in a manner that is negative and destructive of the very thing they would always like to protect and preserve. This is perplexing and paradoxical. Essentially, complementary reflection makes us understand that man is a self-seeking being that always wants to preserve his interest on an ordinary natural scale. But this interest is of an ambivalent nature, as complementary reflection points out. Besides, human interest has in it the inbuilt capacity of concealment such that we can always remain ignorant of its ambivalent nature. Because of this ignorance and because of our exaggerated opinion about man's rationality as well as outright ignorance of the truth and authenticity criterion, as outlined by complementary reflection, we are often prone, when in asymmetrical situations, to act in a manner that negates the authenticating foundation of our interest. By so doing, we negate ourselves and become destructive to ourselves. All these point to man's natural capacity to act in a paradoxical manner. The paradox here is that, while seeking to preserve ourselves, we can unconsciously also seek to destroy ourselves.

This paradox can be illustrated with the concept of globalization. In the world today, we perceive a prevalent form of consciousness that finds expression in a form of movement generally referred to as globalization. This concept with all the positive ideas associated with it is one of the most controversial. To start with, globalisation as a humanistic movement seeks to destroy all the artificial surmountable divides that hitherto had made harmonious coexistence impossible. Globalisation in line with the much cherished principles of complementarity upholds equality of opportunity and privileges. People in line with this new global form of consciousness are ready to discard or sacrifice some of their cherished values in order to become compatible with others from a dissimilar background. Following this trend, barriers to trade and movement from one country to the other is as much as possible removed. Confraternities and unions are being formed to provide the platform where people can discuss their differences and seek for solutions to the problems created by these artificial differences. On the other hand a lot of atrocities are being perpetrated in the name

of globalization. What this shows is that the very ideals that the world holds sacred are the very ideals it can also employ to destroy itself.

We can apply the same idea to the Nigerian context. We know that everyone complains of corruption, nepotism, tribalism, religious intolerance, violence etc. but ironically, the same people who decry these ills, would do everything in their power to uphold their personal interests when in a position to act otherwise. Here, for the purpose of serving their personal interests, they perpetrate exactly the very things they had been condemning all the while.

In Nigeria, as in many African societies, morality and respect for other individuals is highly esteemed. People hate being oppressed and exploited at the expense of others. But we see every day a situation where for short term gains and immediate rewards, people praise, honour and give titles to dubious immoral but **incorrigible** member of society who through wrong means have acquired wealth. But this same people who honour and vote such people to positions of power, authority and honour, because of financial inducements, will tomorrow begin to suffer from the evil acts of these felons and complain bitterly about them.

In Nigeria, we have a situation where people in the Niger delta, for instance, will decry marginalisation and underdevelopment by the federal government, but the same spokespeople of these suffering people, when given the money for their people to initiate projects in their areas will embezzle the money thus worsening and impoverishing themselves.

This situation is essentially paradoxical because nobody will naturally destroy himself. But at the course of preserving the self, their self-interest leads them to defining human interest without any regard for the common good. By negating the common good, they individually negate their own welfare also because their welfare subsists and exists within the common good. In fact every individual self has its essence within the framework of the common, collective, universal and absolute self. The individual ceases to live once it is perceived without the universal collective framework.

The paradox is made possible by over dependence on human rationality and the consequence of ignorance of the ambivalence of our interest as well as the conception of self without the common good. This is where consequent self-interest is anti-self-interest as Prof. Asouzu in his complementary reflection succinctly articulates.

### **Self-Preservation and Self-Interest**

Within the context of complementary reflection, self-preservation and self-interest are interdependent concepts and categories of human existence. The law of self-preservation is a natural law that is immanent in nature and finds expression in all living organisms. Though this law of self-preservation is a natural law it does not have a causal mechanistic and pre-deterministic effect of binding on human beings.

Self-interest on its part is an inbuilt category of human existence in which individuals in every situation have the urge to do those things that will secure their joy and wellbeing even if it is at the expense of others. Over emphasizing and all manners of exclusive projection of self-interest has led to the parochial and negative definition of interest. The law of self-preservation which we all agree is immanent both at the level of individuals and at the level of the group is highly expressed and aided by self-interest.

Self-interest as a notion leads to those actions that are intended to preserve the self. In fact, in the law of self-preservation is involved the notion of self-interest. Self-preservation and self actualisation are self-interest. For instance when a community with cherished values wants to preserve their values, their persons, their ideas, their culture, their future etc. they often fight and clash with other communities around them, when this must be. Here they are following the natural instinct of self-preservation.

People are prone to assume that fighting to secure their self-interest is rational and legitimate because the tendency to do so is conditioned by the law of self-preservation.

But we notice that sometimes because of our bid to preserve our unguided interests, we tend to destroy the self rather than preserve it. It is argued by some people that the law of self-preservation dictates that we do not do anything, any time and at anywhere that will in anyway be destructive to the self. We are all bound

by this law to always act in a way as to preserve ourselves. But the ambivalent nature of our interest misleads us often in asymmetrical situations into acts that do not preserve the self but destroy it. From the complementary point of view, to obey and keep to the dictates of the law of self-preservation well, men must pursue those self-interests that do not compromise the working of the common good. Our interest in other words must be common good oriented to ensure adequate preservation of the self. The definition of our interest thus determines the possibility and success of the effort to preserve the self.

### **Complementary Attitudinal Change**

Complementary attitudinal change has to do with the reorientation and reconstitution of the human mind in a manner that destroys all the divides, preconceptions, and prejudices that had in past characterized our reasoning.

From the complementary perspective, it is clear that people by nature want a holistic good but are by their type of mindset, their perception of reality, their approach to issues of existential reference, their responses to contentious and asymmetrical situations often misled

Complementary philosophy or complementarism as a constructive, normative and practical philosophy that seeks to transform ideas into philosophy, makes some expectations from men and women with respect to complementary attitudinal change. The first expectation is that complementarity advocates a new form of consciousness. It emphasizes a new approach and apprehension of reality. By this demand, people are expected to perceive reality from a total, comprehensive, unified and future oriented point of view as against the individualistic and absolute relativistic approaches.

Before this, complementarity expects that people should know and understand their nature. Man must understand that he is not only a purely rational being, but that there are other quasi rational (irrational) categories that characterize the human nature. Human beings are expected to know how to manage their ambivalent situations.

Moreover, the character of human interest is expected, in line with complementary reflection, to be redefine in such a manner that makes and provides for the common good.

Our attitudinal change must lead us into treating every individual and group as missing links of reality. Here objectivity has to be upheld in recognition of the subjective character of all missing links of reality.

Connected with complementary attitudinal change is the expectation that the awareness of the interdependence of all missing links is central. Our consciousness must attain the transcendent complementary unity of consciousness which is in line with the speculative ontology of the traditional African philosophers of the complementary school. In line with this expectation, our actions must be future referential and proleptic in character. We must begin to act in a way as to ensure the harmony of our present with the past as to ensure and secure the future. Our attitude to reality has to be on a total, comprehensive, unified, complementary and future referential scale and harmonious with the ideals of co-existence and co-determination.

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In Nigeria, we have a situation where people in the Niger delta, for instance, will decry marginalisation and underdevelopment by the federal government, but the same spokespeople of these suffering people, when given the money for their people to initiate projects in their areas will embezzle the money thus worsening and impoverishing themselves.

This situation is essentially paradoxical because nobody will naturally destroy himself. But at the course of preserving the self, their self-interest leads them to defining human interest without any regard for the common good. By negating the common good, they individually negate their own welfare also because their welfare subsists and exists within the common good. In fact every individual self has its essence within the framework of the common, collective, universal and absolute self. The individual ceases to live once it is perceived without the universal collective framework.

The paradox is made possible by over dependence on human rationality and the consequence of ignorance of the ambivalence of our interest as well as the conception of self without the common good. This is where consequent self-interest is anti-self-interest as Prof. Asouzu in his complementary reflection succinctly articulates.

### **Self-Preservation and Self-Interest**

Within the context of complementary reflection, self-preservation and self-interest are interdependent concepts and categories of human existence. The law of self-preservation is a natural law that is immanent in nature and finds expression in all living organisms. Though this law of self-preservation is a natural law it does not have a causal mechanistic and pre-deterministic effect of binding on human beings.

Self-interest on its part is an inbuilt category of human existence in which individuals in every situation have the urge to do those things that will secure their joy and wellbeing even if it is at the expense of others. Over emphasizing and all manners of exclusive projection of self-interest has led to the parochial and

negative definition of interest. The law of self-preservation which we all agree is immanent both at the level of individuals and at the level of the group is highly expressed and aided by self-interest.

Self-interest as a notion leads to those actions that are intended to preserve the self. In fact, in the law of self-preservation is involved the notion of self-interest. Self-preservation and self actualisation are self-interest. For instance when a community with cherished values wants to preserve their values, their persons, their ideas, their culture, their future etc. they often fight and clash with other communities around them, when this must be. Here they are following the natural instinct of self-preservation.

People are prone to assume that fighting to secure their self-interest is rational and legitimate because the tendency to do so is conditioned by the law of self-preservation.

But we notice that sometimes because of our bid to preserve our unguided interests, we tend to destroy the self rather than preserve it. It is argued by some people that the law of self-preservation dictates that we do not do anything, any time and at anywhere that will in anyway be destructive to the self. We are all bound by this law to always act in a way as to preserve ourselves. But the ambivalent nature of our interest misleads us often in asymmetrical situations into acts that do not preserve the self but destroy it.

From the complementary point of view, to obey and keep to the dictates of the law of self-preservation well, men must pursue those self-interests that do not compromise the working of the common good. Our interest in other words must be common good oriented to ensure adequate preservation of the self. The definition of our interest thus determines the possibility and success of the effort to preserve the self.

### **Complementary Attitudinal Change**

Complementary attitudinal change has to do with the reorientation and reconstitution of the human mind in a manner that destroys all the divides, preconceptions, and prejudices that had in past characterized our reasoning.

From the complementary perspective, it is clear that people by nature want a holistic good but are by their type of mindset, their perception of reality, their approach to issues of existential reference, their responses to contentious and asymmetrical situations often misled

Complementary philosophy or complementarism as a constructive, normative and practical philosophy that seeks to transform ideas into philosophy, makes some expectations from men and women with respect to complementary attitudinal change. The first expectation is that complementarity advocates a new form of consciousness. It emphasizes a new approach and apprehension of reality. By this demand, people are expected to perceive reality from a total, comprehensive, unified and future oriented point of view as against the individualistic and absolute relativistic approaches.

Before this, complementarity expects that people should know and understand their nature. Man must understand that he is not only a purely rational being, but that there are other quasi rational (irrational) categories that characterize the human nature. Human beings are expected to know how to manage their ambivalent situations.

Moreover, the character of human interest is expected, in line with complementary reflection, to be redefine in such a manner that makes and provides for the common good.

Our attitudinal change must lead us into treating every individual and group as missing links of reality. Here objectivity has to be upheld in recognition of the subjective character of all missing links of reality.

Connected with complementary attitudinal change is the expectation that the awareness of the interdependence of all missing links is central. Our consciousness must attain the transcendent complementary unity of consciousness which is in line with the speculative ontology of the traditional African philosophers of the complementary school. In line with this expectation, our actions must be future referential and proleptic in character. We must begin to act in a way as to ensure the harmony of our present with the past as to ensure and secure the future. Our attitude to reality has to be on a total, comprehensive, unified, complementary and future referential scale and harmonious with the ideals of co-existence and co-determination.

