

Renaissance as a Cultural Phenomenon: Historical and Philosophical Analysis*

Ejike Sam-Festus Chukwujekwu

Department of History of Philosophy

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University)

Moscow, Russia

E-mail: Sam.philosophy@mail.ru

Abstract—In this article, the phenomenon of the Renaissance is considered as a complex social phenomenon of West European and African cultures. The existence of a deterministic connection between the culture of societies and the substantive elements of the Renaissance culture is revealed. In the process of studying the phenomenon of the Renaissance, A. Losev's approaches were applied to the consideration of the principles of aesthetic theory. The author examines the Renaissance phenomenon in the context of the development of the culture of the European Renaissance, as well as the Renaissance associated with the development of the culture of Islam. The paper presents such a modern socio-cultural and philosophical reality as the African Renaissance, which is closely related to the philosophy of the African continent. The author highlights the essential features of the culture relating to the African Renaissance, shows the features of the philosophical thought of this period. Particular attention is paid to significant philosophical ideas contained in oral African traditions. The analysis of the culture and philosophy of the African Renaissance reveals significant differences in the thinking of the peoples of Africa from the most significant within the Western philosophical tradition.

Keywords—*Renaissance; African philosophy; orientalism; colonialism; Pan-Africanism; renaissance of Islam; afro-pessimism; renaissance paradox*

I. INTRODUCTION

The entry of the Western European world in the period of the XIII-XIV centuries in the late Middle Ages allowed the formation of cultural components of a different structure, called the New European. The Renaissance, or Revival, did not become the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of a new historical period, but was a transitional structure for the development of culture. The essence of this transitional event was that the inevitable process of disintegration of the medieval way of life had already begun, but had not yet been completed, and the forms of the emerging new bourgeois culture were at their initial stage of development. The modern researcher of the Renaissance may well be convinced of how enormous the number of names, written works, scientific revelations, various revival concepts has

been worked out or continues to be explored at present, and attempts to bring something new or combine into a single whole are not always able to bring any scientific fruits.

Revival, as a complex, diverse socio-cultural phenomenon cannot be fully analyzed in isolation from the spiritual and religious spheres of society and should be viewed from the standpoint of socio-philosophical and cultural studies. Also, it is quite reasonable to say that the Renaissance phenomenon can be more fully analyzed within the framework of a systematic approach, since it will allow applying the research tools used by philosophy most effectively.

II. RENAISSANCE AS A PARADIGM PHENOMENON OF WORLD CULTURE

Humanism and anthropocentrism are the fundamental basis of the theoretical concepts of the European Renaissance. Even the very history of the origin of this word from the Latin *humus*, which means soil, earth, perfectly conveys the spirit and main thoughts of that time. The entire Renaissance period is not only ideas, but also the application of humanistic theories in practice. Free consciousness and individualism are the essence of the Renaissance. It is very important, in our opinion, to understand that the freethinking of the Renaissance contained forms of sociopolitical concepts, with their practical and moral aspects. Humanists, declaring man the highest creature, proceeded from the ideas of anthropocentrism. Ancient antiquity did not accept a person without an inseparable relationship with society and the universe. Medieval views also did not consider a person an individual free person. The early Renaissance did not provide for that abstract mercilessness, to which he still had to approach as the processes of the formation of the bourgeois formation developed, but it was a transitional stage. And as if the followers of the Renaissance were not addicted to the exaltation of individualism, they could not fail to see that a man with his subjectivism cannot be the absolute basis of the progressive trends of humanity as a whole. And these undisguised and honest evidence of the weakness and limitations of the human person can be seen in the works of the early Italian Renaissance. The leading direction of this extraordinary historical period is the

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universal restoration of the cultural ideals of the period of antiquity. And this orientation is not accidental. It suggested that the coherence of the physical and the spiritual, the rational and mentally refined sensory perception of the picture of the world, forgotten by the Middle Ages, should be restored. The widespread fascination with antique classics acquired an ever wider coverage, which contributed to the emergence of the so-called cult of Greco-Roman antiquity. Rejecting the existing periodization of world history, the leaders of the Renaissance proposed another: ancient (providing for the ancient period), medium (the period that betrayed antiquity to long oblivion), and new (resurrected classics) [1].

Russian researchers have reasonably doubted the cultural victories achieved by the Renaissance and the interrelated ideas of humanism. In his book, *The Meaning of History* [2], N. Berdyaev, a follower of Russian existentialism, openly sharply criticized the achievements of the Renaissance, calling this period a principled historical "failure" of Western European culture. "The essence and greatness of the Renaissance, - wrote Berdyaev, - that the Renaissance failed and could not, because the ancient, pagan Renaissance is impossible, the Renaissance of perfect earth forms in the Christian world is impossible" [2]. According to Berdyaev, the main contradiction, which does not allow the Renaissance to be realized, lies in the very nature of Renaissance humanism. Humanism, exalting a person, places him in the very center of the foreseeable universe, separating him from Divine spirituality, and opening the way for a "natural" person, but thereby underestimating the status of the person himself. What happened was that the process of self-assertion, which ceased to perceive the connection of man with the Divine absolute truth, nature, led to the destruction of man himself. The solid position of the Russian religious Renaissance was developed in the book of the Russian philosopher Losev "The Aesthetics of the Renaissance". Its appearance in 1978 caused a wave of controversy and was criticized. Being on the positions of Neo-Platonism, the author critically evaluates other philosophical views. Thus, presenting the cultural worldview of the great figure of that era, Leonardo da Vinci, Losev calls him a preacher of "unprincipled artistry" [3], entangled in his own contradictions. Such a position in relation to the great artist of the Renaissance is quite understandable, because Leonardo da Vinci built his aesthetic views on belief in man, denying the Divine and elevating the human to the center of the universe. Just like Berdyaev, Losev is quite critical of the culture of the Renaissance. Facing the "liberal Europe", considering in it the European philosophical tradition in the study of the Renaissance, which, in his opinion, embellishes the ideals, he seeks to show the wrong side of this culture. And then Losev leaves the place of an objective researcher and takes the place of a religious whistleblower, who condemns the creators of the Renaissance, who created literature, poetry, art, drama, and sets them on par with adventurers, rapists, murderers, "immoral criminals." Such an interpretation represents the Renaissance as an anti-culture of the general destruction of cultural value ideals. Losev denies the humanism that the European philosophical tradition under the Renaissance. "Humanists had little in

common with each other, and the term "humanism" itself was a worn, hackneyed, meaningless concept" [3]. Such a bold confrontation with European approaches to the study of the Renaissance becomes quite understandable after the explanation of Losev himself, who reports that the basis of his work were the works of F. Monier and R.M. Zaychik, published in the 19th century, and a reference to the "liberal lacquering" of the Renaissance was gleaned in the writings of E. Panofsky.

Losev himself interpreted the culture of the Renaissance as a demonstration of extreme individualism. Most likely, such a sharp rejection of the culture of the Renaissance was instilled in the philosophical and religious society "In memory of Vladimir Solovyov", in the creation of which Berdyaev took part. Confirmation of adherence to these views, we find in the work of N. Berdyaev "The Meaning of History", where he writes that "God needs a person as a partner to complete this world". The domestic researcher K.A. Chekalov writes in his opening remarks to the translation of the book "Italian Culture of the Renaissance" by the Swiss cultural historian J. Burckhardt: "And yet it was the thesis of "individualism" that turned out to be the most persistent component of the "myth of the Renaissance". At its core, the interpretation of the philosophy of J. Burckhardt within the framework of the idea of a superman, which is rapidly changing the old common order and proving immoralism as a manifestation of inner freedom, was rejected by Losev. It is impossible to deny the right of the researcher to be skeptical and inquiring about the studied historical events. Research of this kind always carries positive cultural trends and has scientific significance. The approach presented by Losev to the study of the culture of the Renaissance was a traditional stage in the development of the religious concept of all European history.

Centuries of Renaissance gave a new impetus to the development of philosophical views. Restoration of ancient views and calls to take an example from nature formed the basis of new humanistic tendencies. Over time, a new socially historical formation for the role of God brought a man, a man-creator, a man-artist, a man-researcher, who cognizes nature and himself. This separation from nature claimed man as the creator of himself. Humanism in the culture of the Renaissance was manifested in the fact that culture is not only a transformed human creator, but also a changed nature. The development of philosophical thought in the Renaissance can rightly be called an ascent to enlightenment with an awareness of the individual value of each person. Vivid representatives of the Renaissance, philosophers, naturalists, artists, sculptors and many others in their scientific and cultural research not only developed new views of humanism, but formed a new community of scientific ideas, showed the way to self-improvement and human development, actually creating a new paradigm explaining the picture of the world, giving impetus to the development of world culture.

III. EUROPEAN RENAISSANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF WESTERN CULTURE

In the period of the XIII - XIV centuries, Western European countries have completed their development, which in history is called the Middle Ages. With the growth of cities, social relations developed and changed. Artisans, traders, artisans, people of new professions, formed a different value system that was different from the current one in the Middle Ages. Philosophical trends that regard human activity as a great creative force created the conditions for the emergence of a new social movement, which fully claims to be in the position of a new ideological direction - humanism. Under these conditions, mainly in the cities, centers of science, art, centers showing civic initiatives, whose active position was not influenced by the church, began to appear. The new worldview, rejecting medieval values, turned to antiquity, based on the image of humanistic relations in society. A huge role in the revival and dissemination of the ideas of ancient humanism was played by the invention in the 15th century of the methods of printing. Spreading throughout Western Europe in the 15th century, the Renaissance in the 16th century reached its highest phase of development. The crisis of ideas that emerged in the second half of the 16th century [4] served as fertile ground for the rise of Baroque and Mannerism. Being, in essence, a link between the Middle Ages and the emerging prerequisites for the emergence of bourgeois ideology, Revival, or Renaissance, can rightly be called a transitional type of culture. The basis for defining cultural processes as transitional is the fact that the Medieval social order was at the stage of destruction, and numerous elements of bourgeois culture were not yet fully formed. The restoration of the lost ancient ideals suggested a return to the harmony of the spiritual and the physical, rational and sensual.

Classical Western tradition considers Italy to be the place of origin of the Renaissance. Despite the fact that the founders of the Renaissance ideas themselves are in the position of denying any connection with medieval culture, undoubtedly, the traditions of antiquity have a close relationship with the positions of medieval Christian culture. The cultural heritage of the Renaissance shows the modern explorer the starting points of the emergence of early bourgeois ideology. This is due to the fact that the Renaissance XII - XIII centuries, is not just a culture, but, first of all, urban culture [5]. At this time, the cities were not as densely populated as they were now and could not fully claim to be the main socio-cultural conglomerates. A completely different picture existed in Italy, where cities were in fact autonomous city-states. The various forms of government from the absolute monarchy (Kingdom of Neapolitan) to the republican form of government (Genoa) led to a complex political situation. Such a trend contributed to the development vector not only in the changing social and social relations of the Renaissance period, but also intensified the development of banking, crafts, and the appearance of manufactories. The emerging process of the necessary division of labor broke the framework of the class and changed the medieval values. Under these conditions,

traditional religious ideals lost their attractiveness, predetermining the emergence of new axiological directions.

Scientific Revolution in XVI-XVII centuries, they presented a picture of the world that was fundamentally different from ancient and medieval views, which created the prerequisites for the emergence of classical science in the sense perceived by the comprehension of science as such in the common field of scientific knowledge and social institutions [6]. It is in this time interval that the separation of religion and field of knowledge occurs. Man focuses on the study of nature. Among many intellectuals of the first scientific revolution, the history of world culture conveys the name of Nikolai Kuzansky (1401-1464), whose philosophical positions in their content are more related to the ideas of Platonism. His ideas had a significant influence on the formation of scientific views of such scientists as Giordano Bruno, Leonardo da Vinci, Nicolas Copernicus, Galileo Galilei, Johann Kepler.

Restoration of the connection with the ancient traditional classics created the conditions for the formation of new ideas about the scientific picture of the world and the person himself. The triumph of the ideas of humanism and anthropocentrism was the main achievement of the culture of the Renaissance, which, of course, was of paramount importance for the subsequent evolutionary development of the entire European civilization.

IV. AFRICAN RENAISSANCE AS A PHENOMENON OF MODERN CULTURE

Modern research of African philosophy requires a special approach. It is impossible to make comparative analogies with Western European philosophical traditions, without taking into account the peculiarities of African consciousness and culture. The philosophy of Africa has its own ideas about the environment and social interaction. The unique, original sociocultural world creates its own criteria for a theoretical explanation of the processes taking place both in the public and in the spiritual life of a person.

The basic philosophical concepts in the 20th century were developed under the influence of the cultural traditions of the European countries and did not fully take into account the peculiarities of the African continent. This situation is due to a number of objective factors. Centuries of colonial and postcolonial dependence, African countries have not passed without a trace. The question: "What is African?" Is one of the main ones [7]. Traditionally, the training of African intellectuals in the spirit of Western European traditions is a frequent phenomenon. Obtaining after the Second World War the independence of a number of African countries (Libya 1951, Sudan 1956, Ghana 1957) [8] significantly influenced the growth of interest in their own cultural traditions. In the philosophical sources of the time, a person increasingly appears not as a member of a religious or racial society, but as a representative of a single world civilization. The conceptual ideas of the African Renaissance were an important element of political goal-setting both in the international arena and in the internal social space of the Republic of South Africa.

At the transitional turn of the 21st century, the authorship of the ideological trends of the African Renaissance belongs to Thabo Mbeki, the party leader of the ANC and the president of South Africa [9]. The doctrine of the African Renaissance envisaged the restructuring of the political system in order to involve the people in the state management process taking into account African specifics, improve the economic climate, fight against HIV and claimed the status of the newest national idea. The policy of maintaining the national cultures of the peoples of Africa, the cultivation of artistic originality, was in its essence a reflection of the principles of humanism in the best traditions of the Western European Renaissance. In 1998, the creation of such a kind of social tool, like the Institute of African Renaissance (IAR) [10], helped the African states of South Africa, Algeria, Nigeria to develop the "Millennium Program for Partnership for African Reconstruction", emerging on the African continent. The propaganda of the ideas of the African Renaissance could not achieve the expected result even in South Africa. The complexity of the implementation of the proclaimed such radical changes on the African continent are quite obvious. The actual analysis of the social situation shows that the peoples of the 53 countries of the continent are mostly united by geographical proximity. The difference in the political structure, the language barrier, differences in religion and cultural traditions are almost insurmountable in the foreseeable future, which allows us to conclude that it is impossible to implement the ideas of the African Renaissance. The answer to the question: "Who should be called African?" [11] is left without a clear answer. One third of the states of the continent are in a state of military chaos.

The main final goal of the Renaissance was political stability, which was practically not achieved until now. The economic situation in Africa is not conducive to the realization of the ideas of the Renaissance. Hunger, poverty, corruption, low literacy - this is the real picture of many countries of the continent. Even the term "African Renaissance" [12] is difficult to understand for the illiterate part of the population, since it does not have linguistic roots, but is essentially Latin.

Against the background of the ideas of returning to the origins of national and cultural identity, conditions arise for "Afro-pessimism", the main argument of which sounds rather gloomy: "peoples who were unable to fix their history in writing, unable to invent a wheel or, at least, lay pipes in their homes, have no right to use the term "Renaissance". Such tendencies of "afropessimism" became possible with an eye on the Western philosophical tradition, which developed through a rather deep and complete analysis of textual sources. And if such textual studies in Western culture are sufficiently numerous, then there are few studies, followers of another philosophical vision. With the emergence of the first human societies and language, philosophical problems found their development precisely in conversations, discussions, and thus constituted a distinctive "folk philosophy", partially recorded, but for African culture, to a greater extent, interpreted orally. And there are a sufficient number of such accumulations over the past centuries, which

makes it possible to use various colloquial forms of philosophical tools for studying such peculiar sources.

It is obvious that the ideas of the General African Revivals are a completely logical reaction to the processes of world globalization, which in the present conditions do not have their development, but despite all the obstacles they have, they deserve to be realized.

The concept of the Universal African Renaissance in its significance and scale could become the main event of the XXI century. The embodiment of the ideas of self-determination, the departure from the colonial past, undoubtedly, could give the necessary vector of development, both in the political and in the social spheres of the continent's life, but, unfortunately, remained unfulfilled.

V. CONCLUSION

An analysis of culture, the Renaissance of the Western world and Africa showed that the Renaissance epoch has a holistic unity and concentrates in itself enormous intellectual energy. There is a close determination of the relationship between the cultural processes of society and the substantive elements of the Renaissance culture. For a long time in the assessments of the Renaissance phenomenon, in their overwhelming majority, there were elements of its idealization. The application of the principles of philosophical analysis allowed considering the interrelated factors of the Renaissance.

For the study of the cultural aspects of the African continent, the preferential use of colloquial forms of philosophical tools has been revealed. The culture of modern society in Africa, the level of its civilizational development determines cultural events similar to the culture of the European Renaissance. We argue that there is a deterministic connection between the culture and social events of the era of Western European Renaissance and the African Renaissance.

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