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## Is there a Safer Way for a Philosopher to Return to the Cave?

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### **Abstract**

In this paper, the author dialogues with the National Universities Commission (NUC) relative to its absolutist approach to accreditation processes. I will focus primarily on NUC's insistence that universities ensure strict compliance with its benchmarks in order to maintain accreditation. This inquiry urges the universities commission to adapt to new conditions in order to better facilitate Nigerian universities to fulfill their mission of offering quality education to the public. I next engage the specter of politicized professional association membership, especially its totalizing tendencies. I will be interested in one professional association's proposal that only its registered members should be considered for accreditation duties, as well as the relational suggestion that only philosophy departments affiliated with it should be granted accreditation. The absolutism of NUC is real, while that of politicized association membership remains a wish but normalizing, nevertheless. I use Plato's allegory of the cave to address the problem of absolutism in academia that receives only scant attention in the literature. Plato's person of nature and nurture is able to escape from the cave and is, subsequently, able to grasp the Forms. Paradoxically, the philosophic life that facilitates Socrates escape from the cave also imposes upon him the duty of returning to the cave so that he can assist with the liberation of those still held there.

Socrates return ends in tragedy, resulting in his death. If the philosophic life is preparation for death, as Plato asserts, he does not envisage the philosopher's safe return to the cave. Of course, he acknowledges safer alternatives but fears that they come at a price to philosophy.

**Keywords:** Philosophy, accreditation, benchmarks, diversity and politicization

### **Introduction**

In 2018, the National Universities Commission (NUC) conducted an accreditation exercise at Benue State University (BSU), Makurdi. The exercise was intended to assist the NUC gauge the capacity or lack there-off of the would-be department of philosophy, about to be demerged from religion, to award degrees as an autonomous department. What transpired during that exercise, especially the commission's totalizing approach to accreditation partially inspired this essay. The universities commission's guidelines insist that individual universities must tailor their programs in accordance with its benchmarks in order to be accorded accreditation. Although a selected aspect of the commission's broader challenges, the accreditation processes affect the quality of university education offered to the public.

Next, I engage the specter of politicized professional association affiliation, an emerging trend that has the capacity of fracturing Nigerian philosophical community. But this pales in the face of the major concern of this essay: normalizing attitude of one professional association. I will pay particular attention to one professional association's proposal that only its registered members should be considered for accreditation duties, as well as the relational suggestion that only philosophy departments affiliated with it should be "accorded full accreditation status" by the universities commission. There is no gainsaying that these wishes, if honored, would further complicate the accreditation process. To be sure, the present accreditation model leaves much to be desired, however,

intervention strategies need not make an already bad situation even worse.

The former is real, while the latter remains a wish at this time but no less absolutist. This essay fears that absolutism, in whatever form, impoverishes our university educational system. If we grant that the university educational system is the only industry this country has at this this, then, we should be concerned about what happens to it. Our public primary educational system is broken. So is the public secondary educational system. And this is deliberate. For those who see the *almajiri* system of education as an alternative to the Western educational model, this is a welcome development. From a business standpoint, though, this means an opportunity to provide private education for profit. Selected available evidence (for example, funding) suggests that our university educational system is headed in the wrong direction. There is much at stake here so much so that we need not covertly hasten its demise by foreclosing discourse.

I use Plato's allegory of the cave to address the problem of absolutism in academia that receives only scant attention in the literature. Plato's man of nature and nurture is able to escape from the cave, and is, subsequently, able to grasp the Forms.<sup>42</sup> Paradoxically, the philosophic life that facilitates the philosopher's escape from the cave also imposes upon him the obligation of returning to the cave to assist with the liberation of those still chained therein.<sup>43</sup> If the philosopher must return to the dungeon, as Plato asserts, what are his options? Socrates, re-entry is violently resisted by the inmates, resulting in his death. For Plato, the Socratic option is one among several others but the most viable. To the extent that the philosophic life means preparation for death, for Plato, the Socratic paradigm remains the best option.

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42 *The Republic* in the Complete works of Plato. John M. Cooper (Ed.) (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997, 514a – 517c. The philosopher's escape from the cave has drawn criticism from Friedrich Nietzsche, who accuses Plato of initiating a flight out of the world.

43 Stumpf S.E & Feiser, J. *Socrates to Sartre and Beyond: A History of Philosophy*. (8th Edition) (New York: McGraw Hills, 2003), Pg. 45.

### **Plato and the Philosopher's Return to the Cave**

Plato's allegory of the cave has the man of nature and nurture escape from the cave and is able to see the Forms. He distinguishes between Forms and sensible objects, their images. He holds the former to be the real and the latter the distorted sense of our world.<sup>44</sup> The former is the abode of a select few; the latter that of the majority of humans. Seen from a certain angle of vision, a certain paradox ensues. The philosophic life that facilitates the philosopher's escape from the cave also imposes upon him the duty of returning to the cave so that he can share his new-found truth with those still trapped in the cave. Stumpf and Feiser note: "When those who have been liberated from the cave achieve the highest knowledge, they must not be allowed to remain in the higher world of contemplation. Instead, they return to the cave and take part in the life and labors of the prisoners".<sup>45</sup> Read as the story of Socrates, it could be argued that his reentry ended in tragedy. For Plato, though, Socrates' tragic re-entry is worthwhile.

The case could be made that Socrates' escape from the cave and return to the same are significant for Plato. Plato sees both as furnishing the ground for the canonization of Socrates "as a secular saint of secular civilization".<sup>46</sup> In comparison to the former, however, Plato holds the latter more significant; more significant because it affords him the facility to develop his position on death and, by extension, advance his immortality of the soul argument. For example, in the *Phaedo*, Plato asserts that the philosophic life is preparation for death: "other people are likely not aware that those who pursue philosophy aright study nothing but dying and being dead".<sup>47</sup> Plato restricts this realization to a select few and supposes that it is not meant for everyone who calls himself a philosopher. Paul Stern explains: "the major difference between the philosopher and other people

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44 See Plato's *Phaedo* in the Complete works of Plato, 74b6-c6.

45 Stumpf S.E & Feiser, J. *Socrates to Sartre and Beyond: A History of Philosophy*, Pg. 45.

46 Stone, I. F *The Trial of Socrates*, Pg. 138.

47 Plato's *Phaedo* in the Complete works of Plato, 64a5.

lies in the willingness of the former to face death in the way that Socrates does and the willingness of the latter to ‘forget this practice’.<sup>48</sup>

Plato’s favorable disposition towards death marks a significant departure from the widely held belief of his Athenian society, which held death to be evil and, therefore, something to be avoided. Stern intimates that following from this understanding, the founder of Athens, Theseus, encouraged his descendants to avoid death at all cost. The bravery of Plato, according to Stern, consists in his ability to break with this dominant understanding of death, insisting that the fear of death stems from ignorance.<sup>49</sup> Plato, who casts the body/soul relationship in conflictual terms, thinks that the soul is better off released from its prison, the body, even as Socrates himself struggles with the possibility of death. He considers the readiness to die honorific but a struggle all the same. Admittedly, it is not easy to be a Socrates; nor is it easy to confront one.

Curiously, though, Socrates cannot say with certainty what awaits him in death, yet Plato still commits him to the pursuit of the philosophic life. For instance, in the *Apology*, Plato writes: “Let us reflect in this way, too, that there is good hope that death is a blessing, for it is one of two things: either the dead are nothing and have no perception of anything, or it is, as we are told a change and a relocating for the soul from here to another place”.<sup>50</sup> Regardless of what it is, Plato believes that death should not be feared but embraced. If it is migration to Hades, it is even better because Socrates thinks it puts him in the privileged position to enjoy the company of great men, such as Homer, as well as enable him to continue to quiz people on philosophy.<sup>51</sup>

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48 Stern, P. *Socratic Rationalism and the Political Philosophy: An Interpretation of the Phaedo* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), Pg. 32.

49 Stern, P. *Socratic Rationalism and the Political Philosophy: An Interpretation of the Phaedo*, Pg. 177.

50 See Plato’s *Apology* in *The Complete Works of Plato*, 40d1-4.

51 Plato’s *Apology* in *The Complete Works of Plato*, 40e1-41b4.

Taylor cautions the student of philosophy not to confuse Socrates' principled stance with Immanuel Kant's duty ethics. He attributes Socrates' motivation to the high intellectual standard he has for himself and indeed for his Athenian society.<sup>52</sup> For his part, Kant derives his duty ethics from reason. Kant discovers the autonomy of reason within the context of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, without providing a theoretical account of the same. Kant, who wants to curb the excesses of reason, thinks that a philosophical account of freedom rightly belongs in ethics rather than theoretical philosophy. On his account, the autonomous reason becomes the postulate of the categorical imperative.<sup>53</sup> Since reason voluntarily gives itself the law, the ethical subject is under obligation to observe the law, regardless of the consequences. Thus, Kant's duty ethics would not allow me lie even to save an innocent person's life. For Kant, then, morality derives its force from the necessity and universality of reason.

Taylor's position can be stated in the following way: Plato derives Socrates paradigmatic status from the latter's ability to distinguish himself from his contemporaries relative to the death question. Taylor thinks Socrates alone seems to understand the imposing demands of philosophy, namely, that we abandon our most cherished possessions - habits, prejudices and traditions - for eternal existence, perfect justice, and much that we long for as humans. Without his heroic attachment to principle, Socrates is an ordinary person and would have used one of the several opportunities available to him to escape death. Of course, Socrates had several opportunities to save his life.

First, he had the choice to remain silent without bothering to recruit disciples to his point of view. Second, he had the option of going into exile upon being charged but elected to stay and go to trial.<sup>54</sup> Third, following the guilty verdict, he

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52 Taylor, A. E *Plato: The Man and his Work* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2001), Pg. 169.

53 Immanuel Kant, Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Trans. and Edited) *The Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), Bxvi.

54 Stumpf S.E & Feiser, J. *Socrates to Sartre and Beyond: A History of Philosophy*, Pg. 39.

was given the opportunity to suggest his punishment. He issued a call to the city to not only spare him but celebrate and maintain him at the public's expense. He argued that he was more useful than the Olympians that they celebrated because, unlike their Olympians, his ability to make them happy was real and not make-belief.<sup>55</sup> Fourth, Socrates' acquaintances exploited the long delay between his conviction and execution to advise him to escape to no avail. He dismissed this suggestion, insisting that he had previously benefited from the city and was, therefore, morally bound to accept the death penalty it now imposed on him. Furthermore he did not want to ridicule himself by going against principles he had propagated all this while.

For Peter Ahrensndorf, Plato's portrayal of Socrates successfully rehabilitates his master's image and establishes him as a hero. He writes:

From Plato's unforgettable account of Socrates' death, men learned to revere what they had hitherto ridiculed. They learned to look up to a kind of human being on whom they had previously looked down. They learned to see nobility and virtue where before they had seen only corruption and vice. Henceforth, the philosopher Socrates was to be repeatedly ranked among the most glorious of heroes and the most holy of martyrs.<sup>56</sup>

Even more significantly for Socrates, his pupil conferred on him the celebrity status he sought at his trial but was denied him by the Athenian society.<sup>57</sup>

It should be stated that the appropriation of Plato's allegory should not be construed as an endorsement of his dualism; rather, it is quickened by at least one striking similarity between his Athens and contemporary Nigerian situation: Both do not

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55 Plato's *Apology* in *The Complete Works of Plato*, 36d3 – 37a1.

56 Ahrensndorf, P. J. *The Death of Socrates and the Life of Philosophy: An Interpretation of Plato's Phaedo* (Albany: State of New York University Press, 1995), Pg. 2.

57 Plato's *Apology* in *The Complete Works of Plato* 36d3-37a2.

do well with criticism, especially when it is public. If I. F. Stone is right, Athens put Socrates to death for being vocal, otherwise there were people with more radical views (Xenophanes) about the gods and the city than Socrates yet none was charged with impiety or corruption of the youth except the latter.<sup>58</sup> Our Nigerian society similarly struggles in this regard, and would rather shoot the messenger than process the message. Our history is rife with accounts of the various administrations' persecution of vocal critics, democratically elected and military alike. The incarcerations of Gani Fawehinmi and the deportation of Patrick Wilmot by the Babangida administration come to mind. Recall also the ill-fated attempt by the Buhari administration to sign hate-speech legislation to foreclose criticism of his administration. Interestingly, the administration is selectively deaf to the deafening hate speech being uttered on a daily basis by *Boko Haram* sect and its kin, the Fulani herdsmen.

Those in academia do not fare better with respect to criticism either. Contrary opinions are taken personally and, for the most part, deemed adversarial. Camaraderie and friendships have been lost or disturbed when hard questions are raised. The difference between academics and politicians, though, is that academics may hesitate visiting physical death on their critics but may not hesitate visiting its other variants, for example, professional, social, and psychological. This notwithstanding, this paper aims to provoke thought and hopes that the issues raised here would be taken seriously and professionally too. I will be as practical as possible in this discourse.

### **National Universities Commission's Accreditation Exercise at Benue State University**

The accreditation exercise at Benue State University was preceded by a program review. The program sought to accomplish two main objectives: First, it sought to design a program that was truly philosophical and rigorous. This meant

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<sup>58</sup> Stone, I. F. *The Trial of Socrates* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1988), Pg. 138.



purging the approved program under the department of religion and philosophy of its non-philosophical elements. The program contained religious courses and were, moreover, made compulsory for philosophy. They included, for example, REL 102: Religion and Human Values, REL 201: Phenomenology of Religion, and REL 311: Spirit World of Africa. Second, we wanted to carve our identity as a department, in terms of the focus we wanted for our program. The challenge we encountered was how to realistically achieve these objectives and still be regulated by NUC benchmarks as it was insisted. Curiously, the guidelines did not only specify courses that must be offered, they were also accompanied by course descriptions.

One has to be weary of the implications of having all Nigerian universities strictly adhere to one set of benchmarks. One major fall out from this is that NUC has arrogated to itself the sole proprietorship of Nigerian university system, and individual universities reduced to campuses of this one Nigerian university. If we grant that it is the right of universities to carve their identity, as I do, then this can be achieved through programming. In this way, prospective students and lecturers could weigh their options as they consider admission and employment opportunities respectively. A devil's advocate explained that NUC benchmarks suggested only the minimum, after which the individual universities could define the character of their program. But our experience revealed something different. For example NUC template opposed our separation of phenomenology and existentialism, insisting that it must be merged and offered as one course.

Suffice it to say that not every strand of phenomenology is existential. The term resists a universal definition. Although Edmund Husserl is the acknowledged father of phenomenology, the term was in use or at least in existence for several millennia before him. For example, Johann Lambert used the term within the context of his epistemology to refer to the illusory nature of objects in space. Following Lambert, Immanuel Kant utilizes the concept to create a distinction between noumena and phenomena. Kant, who initially

contemplated dedicating his *Critique of Pure Reason* to Lambert, holds the sphere of noumena to be one of epistemological ignorance, while restricting knowledge to objects given in experience. Friedrich Hegel appropriates the term in his major piece, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* to describe the progression of consciousness. For Hegel, consciousness starts out as a unity before splitting itself into rival consciousnesses as antithetical realities. Thereafter, it unites itself again through an act of synthesis. For his part, Husserl uses the term to investigate the structures of consciousness.

Furthermore, the commission's current strategy renders it susceptible to a hermeneutical interpretation. Viewed in this way, it could be fairly posited that NUC subscribes to the romantic hermeneutical model of interpretation, which insists that there is a normative way of looking at a text. Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, and other romantic hermeneutists specify the role of the interpreter of a text to be that of seeking to grasp the objective meaning intended by the author - since it is embedded in the text. For the present, this inquiry sides with philosophical hermeneutists, such as Hans Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, in claiming that there are several ways of looking at any text. G. B. Madison notes that Gadamer transforms hermeneutics into "a general body of methodological rules and principles for achieving validity in interpretation".<sup>59</sup> This stance should not be confused with endorsing relativism or arbitrary interpretation of texts. For example, no one can deny that Kant postulates a noumena/phenomena split. If disagreements exist with respect to this aspect of his theory, they exist only at a meta-level and as an attempt to come to terms with the split in question. Like Gadamer, this essay holds some interpretations to be more plausible than others, and further dismisses some as wrong.<sup>60</sup>

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59 Madison, G. B. "Hermeneutics: Gadamer and Ricoeur" Richard H. Popkin (Ed.) *The Western Columbia History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 199), Pg. 705.

60 Madison, G. B. "Hermeneutics: Gadamer and Ricoeur" Richard H. Popkin (Ed.) *The Western Columbia History of Western Philosophy*, Pg. 705.

But this determination has to be made after due consultation with primary texts not on account of NUC alone.

Overall, the either/or approach to accreditation is pervasive but is all too familiar. It is in evidence in the politics of the Nigerian state. The Nigerian state operates a strong unitary system that has little or no room for dissent or competition. The command and control structures in place go a long way to blur the distinction between the private and the public, in the process allowing the leadership unfettered and corrupt access to the resources of the state. The idea that leadership is a self-serving principle coupled with our winner-takes-all brand of politics, have contributed to the corruption that has been witnessed vis-à-vis the distribution of the rewards and burdens of citizenship. Since the rewards and burdens of citizenship are distributed on the basis of where one belongs politically, a we-versus-them consciousness is emanated, and as Stephen K. White notes that it

creates pressure for hardening boundaries, simultaneously fostering conformity among those who fall on the 'correct side' of the dividing lines, and marginalization and denigration for those on the 'wrong' side. The 'others' engendered by this dynamic may be racial, ethnic, sexual, national, or they may have no easily identifiable, external characteristics. They may simply not measure up in terms of some scale or normality.<sup>61</sup>

Not even President MuhammaduBuhari of the anti-corruption fame is immune to this problem. For instance, his administration prematurely retired senior police officers in order to pave the way for the emergence of their junior, his own, as Inspector General of Police (IG). This may not be unique to Buhari administration but recall that he made anti-corruption the cornerstone of his campaign for the presidency, and has paid lip service to this principle since assumption of office.

<sup>61</sup> Stephen K. White "Post Modernism and Political Philosophy" in Edward Craig (Ed.) *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Vol. 7 (New York: Routledge, 1996), pg. 591.

But the NUC is no ordinary commission and, therefore, cannot adapt itself to the political model. It is an agency charged with ensuring the quality of university education. Understandably, it is headed by a professor and supported by a staff that possesses impressive credentials. Its unique status coupled with its mission should insulate it from the vestiges of the failed leadership question, even as I grant that the poor political performance of the Nigerian state has diminished the ability of its weak institutions to effectively discharge their duties. Simply put, NUC cannot afford to suffer the fate of other commissions, for example, EFCC, that are used to exacerbate problems they are supposed to address. If scholarship thrives on disagreements, exchanges, and debates, then, the normalizing approach fails this test.

For example, let us use the following course description for PHL 401: Contemporary Ideologies to illustrate this point. The course description reads:

The course examines the historicity and different meanings and conceptions of ideology. The study of some selected ideologies shall be considered. These shall include: capitalism, socialism, neocolonialism, secularism, Protestantism, Pentecostalism, academic freedom, atheism, communalism, Humanism, and many others. These shall be discussed with reference to their chief exponents.<sup>62</sup>

When I called attention to the fact that the course description was silent on the environment, race philosophy, and feminism, among other contemporary philosophical ideologies, I was informed that the course was designed by a professor and approved by NUC. And that whatever was approved by NUC was sacrosanct. A colleague even defended the course as being philosophical and further argued that philosophy and religion were one and the same, and that one could not do one without

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<sup>62</sup> See Page 35 of the Benue State University, Department of Religion and Philosophy 2015/2016 handbook.

the other. I learned a long time ago that a PhD degree is a degree of humility. I also learned that even geniuses are geniuses at particular things; moreover, they too write/say dumb things sometimes with respect even to their specialties. Aristotle thought women had fewer teeth than men; Kant and Hegel thought Blacks were incapable of abstract thought; Aquinas thought that women were deficient males.

Sometimes the line of demarcation between NUC and the office of academic planning of the university felt very thin. A couple of examples might suffice. It is confusing when the office of academic planning assumes the role of the sole correct interpreter of NUC's guidelines or mind, especially when the former lacks proficiency in the discipline under consideration. I do not see how NUC's benchmarks regarding the philosophy program can be meaningfully interpreted independently of the philosophy department - after all the office of academic planning and the department concerned both work for the same university. It is equally confusing when NUC's directives are communicated verbally and not backed by requisite documentation.

### **Politicized Professional Association Membership Question**

Politicized professional association membership is a recent trend within Nigerian philosophical community. For purposes of this inquiry, my interlocutor will be Philosophers' Association of Nigeria (PAN), the body that currently entertains an absolutist view of professional association membership. I will focus primarily on PAN's suggestion that only its registered members should be considered for NUC's accreditation duties, and the relational suggestion that only philosophy departments affiliated with it should be accorded accreditation. But I will also have in view any other association or persons that entertain an essentialist view on the same issue.

At its emergency meeting of 14<sup>th</sup> May, 2018 at the University of Lagos, Akoka, PAN adopted the following resolution, among several others:

The General Assembly resolved that the Executive Committee should book an appointment with the National Universities Commission for a courtesy call in order to discuss the description of philosophy courses in the BMAS, the quality and caliber of lecturers handling GST courses in all universities across the nation. The meeting strongly urged that the NUC should be encouraged to assign only Professors who are members of the professional association to represent the body during accreditation of philosophy programmes. Departments that have failed to register with the Philosophers Association of Nigeria should not be accredited as is done globally; that any Department whose faculty does not form of 75% of the membership of PAN should not be accorded full accreditation status.<sup>63</sup>

Curiously, this resolution does not name at least one country where the granting or otherwise of accreditation to academic programs is tied to membership in professional bodies. Consequently, the meaning of as “is done globally” in this context remains unclear. However, I am a product of the American educational system – having earned a Ph.D. degree in philosophy from Duquesne University. In light of this, I should be allowed to make a few observations – since the resolution does not exclude any society either.

Professional association membership in American society is voluntary and, therefore, not acquired under threat or coercion. Furthermore, no professional body brings a binary perspective to the question of professional association affiliation, in terms of membership in one necessarily excluding membership in the other. Consequently, I am able to be registered with several US-based professional associations. They include, in no particular order: American Philosophical Association (APA), Association for the Study of World Wide African Diaspora (ASWAD), Caribbean Philosophical Association (CPA), and

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<sup>63</sup> See Resolution ii of Philosophers Association of Nigerian (PAN) resolution at the end of its emergency meeting held at the University of Lagos, Akoka on the 14th May, 2018.

American Catholic Philosophical Association (ACPA). Aside from these bodies, there are specialized societies (Kant's Society of North America) in which one may have membership. Even more importantly, it should be granted that I can have a fulfilling academic career without professional association affiliation.

Suffice it to drive a wedge between an association of professional philosophers, and the wished-for association of departments of philosophy. The former exists, while the latter is yet to exist. Apparently, PAN holds departments to be homogenous entities, and further imagines that its members would necessarily have the same research interests and professional association preferences. Professional bodies are free to think all kinds of thought; however, I hope NUC will resist becoming a tool within the grip of any to pursue an agenda that may not be genuinely academic. I am not unaware of the pluralistic nature of our society, and our inability as a people to deal well with difference. But one would have expected philosophers to handle this better than politicians. There is nothing wrong with having several professional philosophical associations in Nigeria. It would indeed be a healthy development. Furthermore, there would be nothing wrong with acquiring membership in several of them. One advantage of this would be the assurance of several professional philosophical conferences in a year.

As concerns our students, we may wish to leave them out of our professional association politics. Let them freely express their research interests and association preferences. I recall the encouragement we received as graduate students to attend conferences, as well as the little stipend provided to defray cost. Yet the actual conference students attended was not dictated by the department. As it relates to the accreditation of university academic programs, I still do not know which of the numerous associations recommended my department for accreditation. To be honest, I do not think any professional association in that society would consider that a legitimate concern. In this regard, I find the comments of Paul Weiss apt. He writes:

Philosophy students should not be taught to accept this or that doctrine or practice. Instead, they should learn the history of philosophy from someone who is sympathetic with the diverse views that have been presented, and who is trying to find a better answer, one that is achievable only after imagination has been married to demonstration. They will soon discover that reality is more variegated, mysterious, and complex than they ever thought it was.<sup>64</sup>

Weiss made this submission at the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy (1998) in the course of sharing his thoughts on the lessons learned from philosophy in the Twentieth century. His remarks hint at the fact that philosophy is an “ongoing inquiry”.<sup>65</sup> This indicates that as great as the likes of Plato, Aristotle, Kant and others have been, none brought the philosophical enterprise to an end. And each of them enriched philosophy in his own unique way. For example, Plato’s contribution came by way of *Dialogues*, Aquinas formulated and answered *Questions*, and Kant wrote *Critiques*. If this is the case, *a fortiori*, no professional association can claim monopoly over professional association membership - at least not in the aftermath of the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy.

The Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy aimed to be, for all intents and purposes, revolutionary and all-encompassing. This stance was adopted in realization of what conference organizers termed the “emerging geopolitical reality at the turn of the Twenty first century.” It gave space to philosophical traditions that were previously confined to the margins of the so-called mainstream philosophy. For the first

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64 Weiss, P. “Philosophy as an Adventure: Reflections on the Twentieth Century” Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Ed.) *Contemporary Philosophy: Proceedings of the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy*. Vol. 8 (Bowling Green State University: Philosophy Documentation Centre, 2000), Pg. 267.

65 Weiss, P. “Philosophy as an Adventure: Reflections on the Twentieth Century” Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Ed.) *Contemporary Philosophy: Proceedings of the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy*, Pg. 267.



time, presentations were taken from traditions as diverse as feminism, African philosophy, Islamic philosophy, and other minority traditions. At the end of it all, the conference, organizers were satisfied that a level-playing field had been achieved in philosophy:

Never again will it be possible to represent any one philosophical tradition as philosophy tout court. Never again will it be possible to say that some “other” culture’s philosophy is not really philosophy in the proper sense. Never again will it be possible to assert the truth of one’s own position without promising to defend it in a philosophical public that includes the heirs of all the world’s philosophic cultures.<sup>66</sup>

I make bold to say that if anybody is looking for the dominant philosophical doctrine or system in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, they need not look further than diversity.

What then would motivate a professional philosophical body to constitute itself into a philosophical “icon” that people can touch and become philosophers instantly? A PAN apologist explained that it was the only philosophical association with a legal backing since, according to him, it was the only philosophical association registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC). This explanation prompted even more questions: What is a Nigerian philosopher doing at the Corporate Affairs commission? Does a philosophical body require legal backing necessarily in order for it to do philosophy? Before we rush to assign professors accreditation tasks on account of professional association affiliation alone, let us pause to ponder a few perplexities: People without undergraduate (first) degrees have risen to the rank of professor; so are people with professional (non-academic) doctorate degrees. Second, people have been elevated to the rank of professor in areas in which they have no proficiency. Third, and with particular

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66 Jaakko, H. *et al*’ Series Introduction”Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Ed.) *Contemporary Philosophy: Proceedings of the Twentieth World Congress of Philosophy*, Pg. x.

reference to philosophy, people have used alternative qualifications to run promotion to certain levels and ended up as professors of philosophy after earning PhD degrees in philosophy. Recent demotions by some universities suggested these problems to me. To be sure, these anomalies are not melted by professional association membership.

### **Conclusion**

This paper examines the National Universities Commission's (NUC) accreditation model as a selected aspect of its overall struggles. Specifically, it looks at its totalizing approach relative to its accreditation process, as is evidenced by its insistence that Nigerian universities must design their programs in strict compliance with its benchmarks in order to be accorded accreditation. The essay urges the universities commission to be open to alternative horizons in order to foster the requisite partnership with individual universities in their quest to provide quality university education. It also looks at the problem of politicized professional association membership that is merely potential at this time but could heighten the problem of accreditation if not checked. The essay contends that such absolutism forecloses discourse on which scholarship thrives.