POSSIBILITY AND IMPOSSIBILITY: ABSOLUTE OR RELATIVE MODALITIES? A PHILOSOPHICAL ENQUIRY.

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ABSTRACT

Dynamism is undoubtedly a necessary character of man's actual world. Heraclitus of (c.535–470 BC) had already identified the phenomenon of change as a constant and ontological feature of reality. Human knowledge is unarguably limited in scope. The interplay of the typical existential dynamism and the limited human knowledge largely bears on man's knowledge claims about reality. Hence, one's assertion of certainty or doubt about reality is conditioned by one's prism of perception, peculiar circumstances, and cognitive capacity. The basic contention of this discourse is that claims about possibilities and impossibilities are conditioned by one's interpretation of these modalities and one's peculiar situations. A clear vision of the world as replete with a myriad of possibilities is often distorted by a stereotyped, illusive and demoralizing world outlook. The preoccupation of this discourse is therefore to dissipate this illusory and deceptive cloud of inauthenticity, with a view to exposing man to his fullest natural potentials. The philosophical enquiry presents a serious attempt to explain the nature of reality vis-à-vis man's potentials. It is an ingenious effort to construct a systematic framework within which one can justifiably and courageously act with optimism in spite of life challenges.

Keywords: Possibility, Impossibility, Absolutism, Relativism, Objectivism, Subjectivism.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Life often presents itself as a puzzle and changing bag of tricks. Indeed, a number of existential phenomena, are evidently bound by an intricate chain of interaction. The observable inconsistency and unpredictability of events and occurrences indicate that life situations can hardly be absolutely determined or designated as permanent. Everything is in constant flux. What is the case today may not be the case tomorrow. A fashionable idea today becomes outdated and obsolete tomorrow. Yesterday's impossibility is today's possibility. Where then lies the dividing line between possibility and impossibility? Philosophical discourses have attempted an explanation to this puzzle by a conceptual distinction between physical, logical, metaphysical, real, and abstract possibilities. Nonetheless, such mind-boggling question as what constitutes the basis of relationship between possibility and impossibility still perdures. Are they absolute or relative terms? This discourse is an investigation into these modalities and limits of the possibilities that characterize human experiences, thoughts, and actions in an actual world and any possible world.

The unprecedented wave of scientific and technological developments that characterize the contemporary world and the consequent gamut of new discoveries and novel ideas are indicative of the great advancement in man's cognitive capacity. These signal a step forward from primitive dogmatism to a broad-minded approach to life, what P.O. Bodunrin would describe as a magico-religious world outlook and sciento-technical rationality. Whereas the former readily swallows the given hook, line and sinker, the latter is propelled by a progressivist disposition that rules out no possibility in man's actual world. In his words, "the epistemological attitude presupposed by sciento-technical rationality is a fallibilistic one. This is a realization of the tentativeness of our knowledge at any given time." (Bodunrin, 1985:36). The concern of this enquiry, therefore, is to philosophically reassess our perception of the concepts of possibility and impossibility, inspire open-mindedness and courage, as well boost our confidence in the face of difficult situations.

1.1 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

The metaphysical and epistemic claims about possibility and impossibility basically border on modal claims; they are concerned with the mode or way in which a claim is true or false, and how something exists or does not exist. As such, they correlate with such modal concepts as actuality, possibility, and necessity. The creation of a clearly defined universe for this discourse, with a view to ensuring an objective investigation into its basic themes, necessitates a proper delineation and delimitation of a definite conceptual scheme. Indeed, the wide application of the concepts of possibility and impossibility to virtually all cosmological series naturally necessitates proper clarifications with a view to avoiding ambiguity and ensuring analytical clarity.

Possibility

As a concept, "possibility", denotes "a chance that something may or may not happen or exist. It is the state or fact of being possible. It also designates something that might be done or might happen (https://www.merriam-webster.com). In ancient Greek philosophy, 'the possible' is commonly understood as that which either is or will be true and that which is not prevented by anything from happening even if it does not happen. In logic and metaphysics, possibility is generally considered one of the fundamental modalities bordering on the opposition between necessity and contingency. To be sure, whereas a necessary proposition is true or false in all possible worlds, a contingent proposition may be either true or false, and is not necessarily one or the other.

The concept possibility can have a wide range of approaches and interpretations especially given its concerns in the diverse disciplines in which it is discussed. In mathematics, for instance, it largely correlates with the concept "probability", which denotes the likelihood that something will happen or that an event will occur; hence, the greater the chances of something happening the more probability is assumed. "Technically, the possibility of any event is always 1 or 0 i.e. 'yes' or 'no'. If an event is possible, how likely will its occurrence be, under a given situation is probability" (https://ell.stackexchange.com). An alternative to the "probability theory" is the "possibility theory", a mathematical theory for dealing with certain types of uncertainty, which was first introduced by Professor Lotfi Zadeh in 1978 as an extension of his theory of fussy sets and fussy logic. Articulating the positive import of Zadeh's possibility theory, Didier Dubois and Henri Prade (1995:1924-1930) express the view that it provides a valuable setting for alternative decision under uncertainty where a pessimistic and an optimistic decision criteria have been axiomatized.

In the light of Marxist dialectical materialism and historical materialism one can make a distinction between abstract and real possibilities. An abstract possibility cannot be realized in the given historical conditions. The possibility of a collision between planets of the solar system and other large celestial bodies, for example, is abstract; the chance of its occurrence is infinitesimally small. Notably, abstract or formal possibility, must not be confused with the impossible. Whereas the impossible can never be realized because it runs counter to objective laws, abstract possibility does not run counter to objective laws; hence, in principle, it can become reality, but only when the appropriate conditions are in place.

In *Kant's Modal Metaphysics*, Nicholas F. Stang (2016:197) examines Kant's theory of possibility. He locates the key to understanding Kant's critical philosophy in the transformation of the 'ontological' question about possibility – what is it for a being to be possible? – into a question in 'transcendental philosophy' – what is it to represent an object as possible? In his view, Kant's critical philosophy would subscribe to such real non-logical possibility as formal possibility, empirical possibility, and noumenal possibility. The formal possibility presupposes the sensible and intellectual conditions of experience. An empirical possibility has to do with an alteration that can be brought about by beings that are not. We can only entertain thoughts about noumenal possibility.

Philosophical discourses on possibility embrace a wide range of possible perspectives including epistemic possibility, moral possibility, psychological possibility, technological possibility, and legal possibility. In modal logic, subjunctive possibilities (also called alethic possibilities) describe the kinds of possibilities associated with counterfactual situations; they are modalities that bother on whether a statement or a given state of affairs might have been or could be true. It is associated with such words as could, must, possibly, necessarily, contingently, essentially, accidentally, and so on. Logical possibility, metaphysical possibility, nomological possibility, and temporal possibility fall under this

category and are contrasted with epistemic possibility (which deals with how the world may be, for all we know) and deontic possibility (which deals with how the world ought to be). For the purposes of the present discourse, however, the imports of the physical, the logical, and metaphysical possibilities, as contact points for the various kinds of possibility, are considered relevant and deserving of critical consideration.

a. Physical Possibility or Natural Possibility

A state, a fact or an event is said to be physically possible if it is consistent and in accord with natural laws. In other words, if the physical laws of nature would permit the occurrence of an event, it is said to be physically possible. Hence, it is physically possible for a person to be in the same place at two different times but not to be at two different places at the same time. Applying the concept of 'physical possibility' to theories, Daisie Radner and Michael Radner (1982:75) remark that a theory is also considered physically possible if it is compatible with the present framework of science. For instance, the theory of black holes is physically possible, whereas the theory of the inheritance of acquired characteristic is not.

b. Logical Possibility

Logical possibility is determined by the extent to which a proposition is or is not contradictory. An event or a theory is considered logically possible if the proposition with which it is described or stated is not self-contradictory. This implies that logical impossibility expresses a contradiction in terms. Logical possibility is often considered the broadest type of possibility. Many things that are not physically possible are logically possible. Whereas such assertions as "it is possible for John to trek to the planet Mars," "it is possible for sound to travel twice the speed of light," and "it is possible for a dog to speak," are physical impossibilities, they are nonetheless valid if one means logical possibility, since the propositions neither express a contradiction in terms nor breach the laws of logic. Thus, while these are physically impossible, they are logically possible. On the other hand, it is a logical impossibility for a thing "to be" and "not be" at the same time. To say, therefore, that a man is both alive and not alive is a contradiction; it is a logical impossibility.

c. Metaphysical Possibility

Metaphysical possibilities are determined neither by logic nor the actual physical world but by reality itself. Something is metaphysically possible if it is allowed in some possible world. Metaphysical modality is basically concerned with what things are in their nature or essences. The truths of mathematics (2+2=4) and analytic truths or definitions ("all bachelors are unmarried males") express metaphysically necessary truths. Such truths as "water is H2O" and "an object that has a shape has a size," are not necessarily determined by laws of logic or the physical laws of nature; they describe the intrinsic values in the object or reality in question. Whereas the statement, "that something exists and has no cause" is a logical possibility because it is not self-contradictory, it is a metaphysical impossibility. It is also physically impossible in a world characterized by physical laws. The implication, therefore, is that some physical impossibilities are logical and metaphysical possibilities.

Obviously, there is an interlocking relationship between metaphysical possibilities and logical possibilities. Some philosophers, in line with Saul Kripke's (1971:1135-164/1980:20-21) identity theory, maintain that discovered identities such as "Hesperus = Phosphorus" are metaphysically necessary because they pick out the same object in all possible worlds where the terms have a referent. However, such discovered identities can be logically false since their denial does not amount to a breach of the rules of logic. Although water, in reality, contains H2O+ and OH- ions, it could be argued that there is no formal contradiction in the assertion, "water is not H2O even though it is metaphysically impossible. Hence, metaphysical possibility is sometimes either equivalent to logical possibility or narrower than it depending on a philosopher's universe of discourse.

Impossibility

The concept "impossibility," as the opposite of possibility, designates the state or fact of being impossible. It refers to something that cannot be done or exist, or something that cannot happen. The idea of impossibility in contract law, as captured in the online *Business Dictionary* (2019), is also relevant to the context of the present discourse. Impossibility here refers to a situation where a duty cannot be performed because it is contrary to the laws of nature or to a legal rule, or where an uncontrollable event occurs that negates or calls into question the very basis of a contract or transaction.

Possible and Actual Worlds

The concept of "possible world" denotes a metaphysical proposition about how things or state of affairs could have been other than the way they are presently. It is contrasted with the "actual world" which indicates the present situation, state of affairs or the way things actually are. Everything that is actual is therefore possible. On the other hand, some things or states of affairs that are not actual or physically possible are logically possible. Thus, whereas it is physically impossible, given the physical laws of nature, for sound to travel twice faster than the speed of light, it is logically possible.

From the foregoing, a general inference could be drawn with regard to the relationship between the major kinds of possibility relevant to the present discourse, namely, that physical possibilities are a subcategory of metaphysical possibilities which, in turn, are a subcategory of logical possibilities. Remarkably, too, given that there are many kinds or types of possibility, one must identify the kind that is meant in order to understand the modal claim that is made.

2.0 RELATIVISM AS A CRITICAL BASIS OF THE POSSIBILITY AND IMPOSSIBILITY ASSERTIONS

Relativism, as a philosophical concept, is traceable to the Sophists of early Greek philosophy, who denied the possibility of attaining absolute and objective truths. Denying the existence of objective and universal truths, this group of philosophers, especially Protagoras of Abdera (c. 481- c.420 BC) and Gorgias of Leontini (483-375 BC), maintained that truth is relative to the points of view of individual human persons. Given that points of view may differ according to individual perspectives, what is true for one man may not be true for another. For the relativists, therefore, truth is multiple and individual relative. Protagoras' famous statement, "man is the measure of all things, of things that are that they are, and of things that are not, that they are not," as captured in Plato's *Thaetetus* (1961: 266) aims at demonstrating that there is no absolute truth. In his distinction between nature and custom, for instance, he maintained that moral rules and laws for every human society were based not on nature but on custom or convention. He however encouraged the observance of these laws and moral rules for prudent reasons.

The whole thrust of this discourse is to demonstrate that anything is possible depending on man's peculiar situations and the kind or type of possibility meant. In fact, the kernel of the argument could be expressed thus: the concepts of possibility and impossibility are relative to existential circumstances. Indeed, to a very large extent, space, time, man's cognitive faculty, cognitive capacity and peculiar situations largely condition what we perceive as possibility and impossibility. In the light of this perspective to knowledge, Kant (1952a:41-42) advances the thesis that the content of our cognition is determined by certain *a priori* principles or categories of understanding. According to him, the categories of space and time, contain an infinite diversity of determinations of pure *a priori* intuition, but are nevertheless the condition of the mind's receptivity under which alone it can obtain representation of object, and which consequently must always affect the conception of these objects. For him, too, by means of such major categories as quantity, quality, relation and modality, the understanding renders the manifold of intuitions conceivable. However, with a view to restraining the officious pretentions of understanding as the sole determinant of the bounds of possibility of all things, Kant (1952b:461) maintains that the possibility of knowing an empirical object also requires the knowing subject or the mind to have empirical categories for judgement.

Against the backdrop of the apparent presupposition of this philosophical investigation that possibility and impossibility are relative and not absolute terms, it is imperative to elucidate the imports of these qualifiers and their correlates. Obviously, in the context of this discourse, absolutism and relativism are not only the antonyms of objectivism and subjectivism respectively, but largely correlate with them. To be sure, whereas an absolute truth expresses objectivity and an exact reflection of reality, a relative truth expresses a partial correspondence of man's knowledge to reality.

The English adjective "absolute" means "existing independently and not in relation to something else"; it designates "an idea or principle that is valid at all times and in all circumstances." (Hornby, 1995:5). As a derivative of the adjective "absolute", the noun "absolutism" refers to the idea that reality, truth, or morality is "absolute" – the same for everybody, everywhere, and every-when,

regardless of individual culture or cognition, or different situations or contexts." (https://philosophyterms.com>absolutism).

Absolutism, in the context of this discourse, correlates with objectivity and objectivism. "Objectivity is the strict adherence to truth-conducive methods in one's thinking, particularly taking into account all available information, and avoiding any form of prejudice, bias or wishful thinking."(www.philosphybasics.com). According to Julian Reis and Jan Sprenger (2014), scientific objectivity is a characteristic of scientific claims, methods and results. It expresses the idea that the claims, methods and results of science are not, or should not be influenced by particular perspectives, value commitments, community bias or personal interests, to name a few relevant factors. In a similar vein, they maintain that objectivism is the view that there is a reality, or realm of objects and facts, which exists wholly independently of the mind. In a word, objectivism suggests "not being influenced by personal feelings or opinions." (Hornby, 1995:797). As a philosophical system developed by Russian-American writer and philosopher, Ayn Rand (1905-1982), "objectivism" derives from the idea that human knowledge and values are objective; they exist and are determined by the nature of reality, to be discovered by one's mind, and are not created by the thoughts one has (Rand, 1967:23). Objectivism's natural antonym is subjectivism. Subjectivism, especially as propagated and advanced by Descartes in his methodic doubt, is the doctrine that "our mental activity is the only unquestionable fact of our experience," and that there is no external or objective truth.

Despite the natural tendency of scientific discoveries and inventions to inspire some measure of absolutism and dogmatic attitude to reality, dynamism remains an intrinsic feature of science. Openness to new possibilities is an authentic scientific disposition. Little wonder, the constant reforms and revisions associated with scientific theories. The contention here is that no scientific, theological or philosophical formulation or theory should be taken as absolutely final and irreversible. The postulations and the verdicts of these theories can, in the course of time, be overturned or proven wrong or inconsistent. Hence, conjectures and refutations constitute an inherent character of reality. Lending credence to this view, Lawrence LeShan (1974:17) avers:

All scientific knowledge is completely true and valid until the first day of next month.

At that time the new journals come out and everything is up for grabs! "To the degree

that we accept this or a similar statement we have a scientific attitude."

Remarkably, the relativist conceptual scheme features a subtle expression of skepticism. This is also captured in Protagoras' prominent expression thus: "as for the gods, I do not know whether they exist or not for there are many things that hinder knowledge, the ambiguity of the question itself and the shortness of human life." (Plato. *Thaetetus*: 1961). While an attitude of overall skepticism would certainly be a wrong approach to knowledge and life, skepticism, as a cognitive system undoubtedly has its merits. Implicit in the Skeptic's reservation of definite judgement is an acknowledgement of the fact that anything could be the case. Highlighting this positive side of skepticism, Eric von Daniken (1970:30) asserts: "Yet *nothing* is incredible any longer. The word "impossible" should have become literally impossible for the modern scientist. Anyone who does not accept this today will be crushed by the reality tomorrow."

Our habitual inclination to natural stereotypes often militates against open-mindedness to other uncharted possibilities. Forecasts or postulations made of future occurrences often proceed from the present, the observable or what is. From the present, forecasts are made of the future; from what is, what will be; and from the known, the unknown. However, Hume's argument against causality offers a handy and immediate refutation of such natural as well as conventional stereotypes. Hume (2007:19-27) advanced the thesis that there is no necessary connection between cause and effect, that our judgment on causality is merely based on our habit of associating two events because we experience them together. Thus, he insists that our idea of causality is founded on nothing but contiguity, priority in time, and constant conjunction (Hume, 2007:57-72).

Accordingly, the fact that something always happens or is always the case does not necessarily guarantee that it will always happen or always be the case. Likewise, the fact that something has never happened or has never been the case does not absolutely preclude the possibility of its future occurrence. Against the backdrop that the concepts of possibility and impossibility are hereby considered relative to persons, circumstances, space, time, and similar variables, the realm of possibility embraces a wide range of complex social phenomena. Possibilities within human social intercourse are incredibly

limitless. Hence, Eric von Daniken (1970:84) avers: "Impossible? Ridiculous? It is mostly those people who feel that they are absolutely bound by the laws of nature who make stupid objections."

Granted that scientific reasoning is considerably objective, its tendency to appeal to specific scientific community, to some extent, smacks of relativism. In the world of science, for instance, the feasibility of theories is often largely dependent on their acceptability, cognitive import, practical relevance, and the standards of the scientific community in question. Daisie Radner and Michael Radner (1982:78) re-echo this idea thus:

It would be silly for us to look back at a seventeenth-century debate and say, "The dopes! Why didn't they adopt the general theory of relativity?" We cannot evaluate a seventeenth-century debate by inserting twentieth-century answers that weren't around then. Nor can we pretend that earlier, more primitive theories are equivalent to later, more sophisticated versions. It is fashionable in certain quarters to say things like "Heraclitus had the key to modern physics.' This is sheer poetic metaphor. The insights of a philosopher of the fifth century B.C are a far cry from twentieth-century quantum mechanics. This is not to downgrade the achievements of the ancients. One only counts what is available to the debates at the time of the debate. Quantum mechanics was not an available alternative in Heraclitus' day and, it must be added, Heraclitus is not an available alternative in our day. A theory must be a serious contender in its own time.

Corroborating the view that possibilities are relative to the individual thinker and his circumstances, William James (1919) associates a strong positive mindset with the disposition to believe in and act in accordance with a live hypothesis. With a view to highlighting the imperative of a broad-minded approach to reality, therefore, he writes:

"Let us give the name of hypothesis to anything that may be proposed to our belief; and just as the electricians speak of live and dead wires, let us speak of any hypothesis as either live or dead. A live hypothesis is one which appeals as a real possibility to him to whom it is proposed. If I ask you to believe in the Mahdi, the notion makes no electric connection with your nature, - it refuses to scintillate with any credibility at all. As an hypothesis, it is completely dead. To an Arab, however (even if he be not one of the Mahdi's followers), the hypothesis is among the mind's possibilities: It is alive. This shows that deadness and liveness in an hypothesis are not intrinsic properties, but relations to the individual thinker. They are measured by his willingness to act. The maximum of liveness in hypothesis means willingness to act irrevocably. Practically, that means belief; but there is some believing tendency wherever there is willingness to act at all," (James, 1919:3-4).

The foregoing is far from a blanket canonization of relativism, which has already been considerably criticized by Socrates and Plato, who believed in the absolute universality and objectivity of truth, and the possibility of man attaining it. The attempt here is rather to demonstrate that our assertions of possibility and impossibility are, more often than not, relative to individual perceptions of reality, historical conditions, and immediate existential circumstances. Simply put, in addition to human capacities, the validity claims to possibility and impossibility are determined by specific contextual frameworks and universe of discourse.

3.0 ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PRO-POSSIBILITY HISTORICAL FACTS AND HUMAN EXPERIENCES

Positions about matters bordering on possibility and impossibility are often not reasoned but assumed on the basis of public opinion. Yet, a number of historical evidences indicate that what in public opinion was considered impossible at a given time, in the course of time, became possible. Yesterday's impossibilities are today's commonplaces: likewise, scientific and technological innovations and inventions of today would be obsolete tomorrow. Impressive support for this view abounds in a number of philosophical writings as well as in the eloquent testimonies of numerous experiences of men in the course of history. Many ideas once dismissed as ridiculous, obnoxious, and unrealistic were eventually proved to be realistic and laudable. The sciento-technological advancements and inventions of today were considered impossibilities yesterday. Such breakthrough in science and technological inventions as the television, the radio, the internet, space explorations, weather

predictions or forecasts, etc., were sometime considered impossibilities. Indeed, we live in an age in which such phenomena as the electricity, automatic system, the cyber technology, and space exploration have, as actualized possibilities, overturned the impossibility verdict of the ancient world.

Even in the sphere of science, theories still undergo constant revision, thanks to openness to possibilities and readiness to shift grounds. The attitude of clinging tenaciously and with utmost pertinacity to the idea that stones could not exist in the sky, for instance, would rule out the possibility of meteorite impact. Similarly, an obstinate hold onto the geocentric astronomical model, which placed the Earth at the center of the Solar System, would not have given way to the Heliocentric model in which the Earth and planets revolve around the Sun as the center of the Solar System. D. Radner and M. Radner (1982:81) capture this idea in these words:

Scientists have been known to change their minds on the question of what is possible and what is impossible; they are likely to change their minds again. Quantum mechanics was not an available alternative in the seventeenth-century, when all the candidate theories were mechanistic and deterministic. Today it is not only an available alternative but the best available alternative. Likewise, it may also happen that things scientists now believe to be impossible and unworthy of consideration will someday be deemed possible and worth considering. Who is to say what tomorrow's available alternatives will be? Like we say, anything is possible."

For any event, there is some theory with which it is consistent. Some of the things that are inconsistent with present scientific theories will be consistent with the theories of the future. With regard to future choice of theories, therefore, the door is wide open. Granted that scientists measure possibility in terms of laws, the possibility of a future event violating such laws cannot be absolutely ruled out. Future scientific theories might go against the laws of logic, and even the law of noncontradiction that we now hold as inviolable. Just as new ideas are continually born, innovations in science, technology, politics, trade and industry are constantly being reviewed, reformed, and updated with more advanced features. Thus, the discoveries, inventions, and achievements of a given age or generation are continuously being supplanted by those of a succeeding one. Viewed from the prism of scientific mindset, therefore, the world reveals a broad spectrum of possibilities.

The Russian scientist, Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, who developed the scientific theory of rocketry over a century ago made a startling prediction, expressing an apparently fantastic idea at the time. In his famous work, *Exploration of Outer Space by Means of Rocket Devices*, Tsiolkovsky (1903) demonstrated that rockets could be used for flight to other celestial bodies and so predicted that man will take a rock from the moon. This seeming impossibility became a reality on July 20, 1969, when the first artificial satellite of the Earth was launched from a Soviet Cosmodrome. Of course, Yuri Gagarin's first orbital flight, and the flights of Soviet and US space stations paved the way for the first landing on the moon of a piloted spaceship. As a supreme confirmation of Tsiolkovsky's prediction, Neil Armstrong and Edwin Aldrin eventually set foot on the lunar surface and took the first samples of moon rock and dust.

Samuel Morse was said to have been ridiculed by some people when he explained his plans for telegraph communication in 1842. Likewise, when Bell Telephone applied for a patent in 1876, some communication experts dismissed the telephone idea as a toy. Also, Thomas A. Edison's attempts in 1878 at finding a filament for the incandescent lamp would ordinarily pass for an impossibility in his days save for his persistence. Today the narrative has changed, thanks to the positive mindset of these inventors that remained undaunted even when their set targets seemed fantastic and impossible.

In essence, historical experiences demonstrate that what people of a given century consider fantastic, impracticable and impossible, the people of another century consider matter-of-fact and commonplace. The contents of a twenty-first century newspaper, for instance, would hardly make sufficient sense for people who lived few centuries ago. Such generation would find it difficult to make sense of such terms as Automobile, Spaceship, Internet, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Astronaut, Supermarket, Air-conditioning, and Nuclear missile. Similarly, postulations about a possible world where the present physical laws of nature are supplanted may seem fantastic to people in our contemporary world. The contention, here is that the phenomenon of dynamism as a necessary character of reality guarantees that anything is possible and that possibility is relative to time, space and existential circumstances.

4.0 THE IMPLICATIONS OF ACKNOWLEDGING A WORLD OF INFINITE POSSIBILITIES

The German philosopher, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) had expressed the view that man is a bundle of infinite possibilities. Indeed, man is a social animal with an incredible capacity for learning and self-improvement. Whereas basking in the whirlpool of these possibilities is an effective predisposition for auto-transcendence, allowing the demoralizing attitude and thoughts of impossibility to stifle one's zest for self-actualization smacks of inauthenticity. Buttressing the fact that infinite possibility is an ontological character of Dasein, Heidegger (1962:185) writes:

...any Dasein has, as Dasein, already projected itself; and as long as it is, it is projecting. As long as it is, Dasein always has understood itself and always will understand itself in terms of possibilities. Furthermore, the character of understanding as projection is such that the understanding does not grasp thematically that upon which it projects – that is to say, possibilities. Grasping it in such a manner would take away from what is projected its very character as a possibility, and would reduce it to the given contents which we have in mind; whereas projection, in throwing, throws before itself the possibility as possibility, and lets it be as such. As projecting, understanding is the kind of Being of Dasein in which it is its possibilities as possibilities.

The acknowledgement or the assumption that the world is replete with limitless possibilities inspires a proactive attitude and leads to the development of a habitually positive mindset. Operating with a mindset that de-emphasizes impossibility and considers everything possible not only opens boundless vistas to human reason but radically stimulates it to penetrate the deepest secrets of the world. In fact, with this pro-possibility frame of mind, man's creative powers become inexhaustible as he actively engages his world with a view to its positive transformation.

Incidentally, we are often enslaved and ensnared by a number of pretensions and stereotyped modes that inadvertently suffocate our capacity to think clearly. One who habitually assumes a propossibility disposition has the semblance of the escaped prisoner or the philosopher in Plato's *allegory of the cave*. He becomes freed from the encumbrances and restrictions imposed by a limited view of reality, which only presents shadows instead of essences. Believing and acting as though everything is possible is tantamount to 'thinking outside the box.' Sometimes, what is considered impossible may not have been given a trial at all or a sufficient trial. Assuming a world of infinite possibilities therefore entails cordoning off all forms of demoralizing sentiments and world outlook, and permits no limit to the range of self-actualization. It is certainly against this backdrop that J.M. Fuster (1998:198) avers, "The pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; the optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty."

Although man enjoys a preeminent position among all creatures, the actualization of his fullest potentials is sometimes impeded by his ontological limitation and finitude. However, while man's finitude imposes a temporal limitation, it neither absolutely precludes the possibility of his self-actualization nor implies an absolute incapacity as far as having dominion over the earth is concerned. The Christian religious tradition systematically weaves this potential into the phenomenon of faith as an unfailing power of expectation that guarantees that everything is possible; hence, the biblical assertion, "everything is possible for the one who has faith." (Mk 9:23). Martin Luther corroborates this view as he avers, "it is the quality of faith that it wrings the neck of reason: what seems impossible to reason becomes feasible to faith." (Garber and Rutherford (2013:29).

An unyielding dogmatic cleavage to a given status quo could not have allowed the movement from agrarian economy to industrial economy or from analog to digital technology. An open-minded approach to reality is indeed an authentic scientific disposition that makes for progress and openness to infinite possibilities. Highlighting the import of having a positive mindset especially in science, D. Radner and M. Radner (1982:84-85) write:

"Anything is possible" is a useful slogan in the context of the creation of new theories.... In the context of creation, "anything is possible" functions as a *heuristic device*. That is to say, it serves to stimulate and to encourage the creative process. In the context of creation, "anything is possible" means this: Scientists should keep their minds open to all possibilities when trying to come up with a new theory that will

succeed where the old one failed. They should be bold in their search for a new way of dealing with the phenomena and the problems at hand. They should not shrink from pursuing a line of thought even though it seems on the face of it to be preposterous.

Remarkably, from the perspective of the polar argument, one would hardly scale through the hurdle of absolutely dismissing all impossibilities without acknowledging, at least in principle, the possibility of having some real impossibilities in the cosmological series. Indeed, a comprehensive consideration of all the possibilities implicated in the propositions about facts would implicate some measure of limitation. In the final analysis, however, the decisive imports of time and existential circumstances remain very critical in determining what is actually possible or actually impossible.

In essence, the present-day scientific marvels, facts, and breakthroughs, which at some point in history were considered absolutely impossible indicate that such phenomena or variables as space, time, and man's immediate circumstances constitute the basis on which we adjudge reality and events possible or impossible. If we are skeptical about the possibility of achieving a given feat, the chances are that we cannot achieve it; if we are confident about the possibility of achieving it, chances are that we will succeed.

6.0 CONCLUSION

The validity claims to possibility has multiple dimensions and several conceivable interpretations. To determine what is possible, therefore, one must decipher and clarify the kind of possibility meant by any claim, that is, whether it is logical, physical, metaphysical, legal, or moral. It is also necessary to ascertain whether the proposition stating it accords with the relevant laws that govern the type of modality in question. In other words, does the statement appropriately represent the laws of logic, the physical laws of nature, moral laws, and so on? These considerations indicate that that there is a wide range of possibilities with regard to actions open to man or achievable with his incredible capacity to explore the world and achieve self-realization and auto-transcendence. In fact, impossibility is asserted when man's inventive potentials at a given instance have not been activated or are not at their best.

The foregoing is an invitation to embrace objectivity and stimulate a more open-minded approach to life. Obviously, one's mindset or general disposition is a function of the interplay or interaction between one's nature and socio-cultural environment. The limited nature of man's faculty of cognition, notwithstanding, he possesses the power to explore the innermost recesses of nature in his exercise of reason. When this power is accompanied and complemented by a strongly determined will, the sky remains his limit in his attempt at actualizing possibilities.

In sum, this philosophical discourse basically aims at stimulating a more rational, critical and logical approach to life situations by offering some philosophical bases for assuming that anything is possible. By assuming a more positive attitude and embracing a wider, more critical and objective approach to life, especially in terms the possibilities associated with human values, knowledge, and reality in general, a new level of reasoning and a positive reconstruction of human experience would be achieved.

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