

PHILOSOPHY, HUMAN FORMATION AND THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD

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Abstract

This paper seeks to examine the relevance of philosophy to human development and in extension, the contemporary world. This is premised on the ground of the misconception about the discipline of philosophy. The paper develops by drawing on the meaning of philosophy with which it was clearly stated that it is a rational quest for wisdom. This preoccupation of philosophy clearly negates the wrong way with which philosophy is regarded. The paper elicits further, that philosophy is essential for human development in that it helps the individual to reason and think correctly, helps to facilitate self- knowledge and equally helps in the interpersonal relationship with people of other cultures. Thus, man is said to be freed from the imprisonment of prejudice. The paper further argues that philosophy gives clarity to some theological concepts. This means that philosophy has answers to almost all the mysteries in reality. It, however, concludes that the contemporary world which is characterized by science and technology will only thrive because of the tools of philosophy. This means that science and technology, which people see as the 'messiah' of this present age, will only achieve its desired goal if the methods of philosophy are adhered to and this will be the basis for authentic human development.

Keywords: Philosophy, Human Development, coherency, Logicality.

Introduction

Following social contract theories, there is the notion that the state of nature was characterized by barbarism and anarchism. However, in order to solve this problem, the likes of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean Jacques Rousseau came up with their social contract theories. Although all three have different approaches, yet one thing that is common to them, is the need for a state to be organized for the protection of its members. From Plato's political utopia, the one that must be a leader must be a *Philosopher-King*. Commenting on the position of Plato, A. S. Fotiou says that "the member of this group (Guardians) form a deliberative and a legislative body of the state. This is because their predominant virtue is wisdom, which they use as the basis for law and order".¹ This is due to Plato's notion of class stratification of the ideal state which is bifurcated into three as evident in his Republic: the Guardians (rulers), the Auxiliaries (soldiers), and artisans (workers). These guardians or rulers are the people in the society whose duty is to steer the ship of the state. The notion of the philosopher-king or the ruler is based on the conviction that the philosophers have knowledge, intellect and are trained to govern. Plato, however, believes that an elaborate and rigorous education of the guardians is a pre-requisite for the possible realization of the ideal state. This ruling class must necessarily exercise strict control over education, art, war and even marriages so as to keep away corrupting influences and promote social harmony according to philosophical principles.² The above assertions of the contractarians and Plato, underscore the thought of Francis Bacon that "Ideas rule the world". This is because a firm grasp of philosophical tools which is *wisdom-centered* will help in the fostering the society. Philosophy trains human mind to reason correctly and rationally. When this irrevocable truth is put in the right perspective the society becomes a better place.

Be that as it may, there is this popular belief by some persons that *philosophy does not bake bread*. This is because for them it is a waste of time to study philosophy or to be a philosopher since it has no relevance to humanity. For some, the only thing that philosophy is capable of doing is that it has turned people into atheists. Some see philosophy as that which is out of touch with reality. For them,

philosophy cannot thrive in the wake of science and technology. J.O. Ndubisi captures more of this misconception when he says that:

There is no discipline that is generally misunderstood and misconceived as being irrelevant to human society as philosophy... some said that philosophy is a study in futility ... often times, people think that the students of philosophy are wasting their precious time in studying philosophy. Some non-students of philosophy do not understand what philosophy students do in their philosophy classes".³

The task of this paper therefore, will be to argue for the importance of philosophy to humanity and society. The thesis to be pursued will be that of spelling out the relevance of philosophy to human development in this contemporary world while addressing the misconceptions that have been there over time. This essay adopts the analytic, prescriptive and critical method. However, it is important to note from the outset that the attempt of this paper is not to construct a rigid, perfect and all-embracing relevance of philosophy to the world as this would be a futile and impossible mission. Rather, the goal is to provide a framework that will foster on-going research on this area of study.

Meaning and Nature of Philosophy: A General Overview

H.S. Staniland says that a question which takes only three words to ask is, one might think, a question which a presumed expert ought to be able to answer in three well-chosen words of his own. But, as every philosopher knows, 'what is Philosophy?' is not such a question. Professional dignity forbids any of us to reply 'I don't know'.⁴ The implication of this, therefore, is that philosophy we all know has no univocal definition. This is because, giving any formal definition of philosophy presupposes some conceptions not likely to be shared by all philosophers.

The implication of this is that different philosophers define it from different ideological ambience, orientations, schools of thought, socio-political bents or even personal convictions. Despite the distinctiveness of thought as regards the meaning and definition of philosophy, one thing that all philosophers generally agree to, is that *philosophy is a critical enterprise, something dynamic or a*

quest to find out. This means that philosophy is a search for, or indeed a spirit of evaluative exploration. It is a term that is derived from two Greek words *philos-* love and *Sophia –wisdom.* This means that philosophy is the love of wisdom. It is a search for truth of reality. In other words, the essence of philosophy is to gain insight into reality and gain knowledge of reality and truth.

It is from this perspective William Lawhead sees philosophy as a “human attempt to systematically study the most fundamental structures of our entire experience in order to arrive at beliefs that are conceptually clear, experientially confirmed, and rationally coherent as possible.⁵ For him, philosophy seeks clarity of all our basic beliefs and assumptions. Philosophy for Matthew Izibili, is regarded as “a process in which the individual is consciously engaged in the activities of a rigorous thinking process or deep reflective method with a view to establishing orderliness”.⁶ This definition shows that philosophy is goal-oriented and its goal is to seek orderliness in the society and world at large.

A close look at the different definitions of philosophy shows that man is placed at the center of it all. This is as a result of man’s quest to know more about reality. Williams Aso captures this clearly when he says that “man as the subject of philosophy has unquenchable thirst for knowledge not only for empirical realities alone but also phenomenal realities and everything that concern human experience and the universe in general”.⁷ Kolawole Owolabi says philosophy is conceived as the critical reflection of human beings on the problem of their existence and essence”.⁸ Olayinka Opafola sees philosophy as an attempt to resolve problems of man, his nature and the universe.⁹ A close look at most of the definitions of philosophy, shows that it has to do with giving answers to the reality of man’s ontology.

Philosophy is said to have two orders. The *first order* and the *second order.* Philosophy of the *first order* embraces among others, the following philosophy of life, culture, traditions, customs and worldviews, religion, beliefs, music, aesthetics, proverbs and folktales, *et cetera.* The *second order* of philosophy, is seen as something deeper and more involving, it is a rational venture,

critical and detailed in outlook, a reflective approach, an inquiry that truly involves the commitment of the enquirer.

Philosophy is known to have four major branches Metaphysics, Epistemology, Ethics and Logic. Metaphysics is the study of reality. Sylvester Enomah captures this clearly when he writes “metaphysics is that branch of philosophy, which studies and investigates that principle that pervades all reality.¹⁰ This simply means that metaphysics as a branch of philosophy studies reality as a whole and not just a portion of it. Corroborating this point Enoch Stumpf says that metaphysics refer simply to the subject matter or reality beyond physical nature or beyond the things we see.¹¹

Pantaleon Iroegbu defines metaphysics as that branch of philosophy that studies reality as such, i.e., in its most comprehensive scope and fundamental principles.¹² Metaphysics gives the deepest meaning to reality. This further underscores the fact that metaphysics extends to all reality both those perceptible to the senses which we come to know by empirical investigation and those realities that we cannot experience or know experientially but through abstraction, *apriori* and *aposterori* reasoning. It is derived from the Greek expression *Ta meta ta physica* (after the physics).¹³ It is a title that is credited to Andronicus of Rhodes. Consequently, the subjects of metaphysics were then called “the treatise after the physical treatises”, which is the literal meaning of the word metaphysics. Simply put, it means over and beyond the physical.¹⁴

Epistemology as a branch of philosophy seeks to evaluate our knowledge claims. This is as a consequence of the sceptics who deny the possibility of knowing. It is derived from the Greek word *episteme* which means knowledge and *logos* which means theory or study.¹⁵ It therefore means that epistemology is the theory of knowledge. In other words, it is the study of human knowledge, the study of the nature of human knowledge, its origin, its scope, its limits, its justification, its reliability or otherwise, its certainty or otherwise.¹⁶ In the same vein, Anselm Jimoh sees epistemology as a theory that deals with the analysis of sets of facts as principles that guide our understanding of issues that relate to knowledge.¹⁷ This means that as a theory, epistemology investigates the nature and possibility of knowledge by asking questions relating to whether we

can have knowledge as we describe and understand it. As the study of the nature of knowledge and justification, Blessing Agidigbi says epistemology attempts to provide answers to: in particular, (a) what knowledge is? (the defining components) (b) how do we get it? (the substantive conditions of sources) and (c) can our means of getting it be defended against skeptical challenge? (the limits of knowledge and justification). These questions are all aimed at explicating the nature of knowledge and how to establish the claim that one actually knows what he claims to know.¹⁸ It is not in doubt that the whole idea of philosophy deals mainly with knowledge. There are different sources of knowledge, they include empiricism, rationalism, and so on.

Ethics as a branch of philosophy deals with the *ought* and the *ought not* of human relationship. On this Anthony Asekhauno and Gregory Ogbenika write ‘ethics is all about the morality of the actions of human beings. It has to do with ‘ought’ of human behavior and life’.¹⁹ Williams Aso sees it as “the study of the basic principles about what is right and wrong in human relationship with others and ecosystem”.²⁰ This is because etymologically, it is derived from the Greek word *ethica* having its root in *ethos* i.e., custom which means the fundamental orientation and inner disposition of an individual about life. Following the notion that the actions of man can be both instinctive and deliberate, there exists the difference between *acts of man* and *human acts*. Higgins holds that a *Human act* is a free and deliberate act with three main known elements: motion of the will, previous intellectual knowledge of the purpose of the act and freedom.²¹ The ethical implication here is the assumption that man is the master of his act. Hence, he can be held responsible for his actions or inactions. *Acts of man* on the other hand, are actions that are natural to the human person (blinking, sneezing, farting and so on).

However, there exists different ethical principles with which human conduct is judged. These principles form the various aspects of ethics. They include Normative Ethics (Teleological and Deontological), Descriptive ethics and Meta-ethics (Naturalism and Anti-naturalism).²² There is no doubt then, that the basic concern of ethics is that it is the area of philosophy that reasons about morality,

particularly the meaning and justification of claims concerning right or wrong actions, obligation, moral rules, right, virtue, the good life and the possibility of objective morality.

Logic is derived from the Greek word *Logos* which simply means *word that is spoken* and the consequence of this meaning later on developed to imply human thought or human order of reason.²³ Logic is concerned with the principle of valid inference. The concept of validity has to do with the logical assessment of arguments. This is because validity as a formal concept, is mainly concerned with the formal connection between the premises and the conclusion of an argument.²⁴ An argument cannot be both *deductive* and *inductive*, and the quest for every logical argument is to bring about rational proof for validity and soundness. This further strengthens the fact that the task of logic is philosophically characterized with the skill of recognizing valid and fallacious inference so that one can distinguish logical and illogical arguments. Williams Aso argues that logic is a critical thinking directed at distinguishing valid from invalid arguments or reasoning. Logic deals with the question, nature and forms of human inferences.²⁵ On the issue of the validity or invalidity of an argument, an argument is said to be valid when there is the logical connection between the premises and the conclusion. While it is said to be invalid when the truth of the premises does not entail the truth of the conclusion. When the premises are true and the conclusion is false, the argument is invalid.

Other sub-branches that emanate from the above **main branches** of philosophy, include, axiology, socio-political philosophy, philosophy of mind, philosophy of art, philosophy of science, philosophical anthropology, philosophy of education, philosophy of mathematics, philosophy of economics and so on.

Philosophy, however, is known to have *three main methods or approaches* as some authors will put it. They include: the speculative, the prescriptive and the analytic. Where the *speculative* tool consists of the mental reflection about the universe, the *prescriptive* seeks to establish a workable standard for placing values, judging conduct and art appraisal. While, the *analytic* focuses attention on the meaning words and expression. It also goes

further to show that the meaning of words are relative depending upon prevailing circumstances. All of these three put together makes philosophy methodologically structured. The discipline called philosophy has lingered on in history from the ancient era, down to this contemporary world.

Philosophy and the Essentials of Human Formation: Towards Liberating the Human Person from the Clogs of Ignorance

Human formation is all about the development of a well-rounded and competent man, possessing personal maturity. The basis of this is the fact that we human beings are physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, social, intellectual and spiritual ...”²⁶ This development can only flourish when there is a firm grasp of the tools of philosophy. “This means that one needs to grow in this aspect of humanity because “growth in one’s personal humanity is therefore the foundation of ones spiritual, pastoral and intellectual formation.”²⁷ In order not to be swayed by the demagogue of acute deceit, illogicality and irrationality, it is expected that philosophy forms a major part in the *terminus ad quem* and the *terminus a quo* of man’s existence. This is because the failures due to lack of rationality and criticality in our world is almost indiscernible.

On the necessity for philosophical education for an authentic human formation, the Conciliar Fathers writes: “Philosophical subjects should be taught in such a way as to lead the students gradually to a solid and consistent knowledge of man, the world and God. The student should rely on the philosophical patrimony which is forever valid, but should also take account of the modern philosophical studies, especially those which have greater influence in their own country, as well as recent progress in the sciences. Thus, by correctly understanding the modern mind, students will be prepared to enter into dialogue with their contemporaries”.²⁸ This means that for the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, the goal of philosophy must be in such a way that it must lead to a better knowledge of man and the reality of his existence which will be connected to the one who is his Primary Cause, God. This will not exclude an acceptance of scientific findings after its objective evaluation.

The document went on to state that, “the history of philosophy should be taught in such a manner that students may grasp the fundamental principles of the various systems, retaining those elements which are proved to be true, while being able to detect and refute those which are false. The teaching method adopted should stimulate in the students a love of rigorous investigation, observation and demonstration of the truth, as well as an honest recognition of the limits of human knowledge.”²⁹ This explains why the different histories and epochs of philosophy are exposed to the students from year one to four in the Bachelors level down to masters and doctoral level. The essence of these historical surveys is to be able to understand better the background or system through which other philosophical trends were explicated. For instance, the theme of the ancient philosophy is speculation on the universe, the medieval era saw the need to marry religion with philosophy, the modern era which started with Descartes was to apply scientific cum mathematical principle to philosophy thereby breaking away from the faith-based philosophy of the medieval era, the contemporary or post-modernist is more of a deconstruction from traditional philosophy like the thought of James Ladyman’ *naturalized metaphysics*, Jacque Deridda and the *Binary Opposite*, Emmanuel Levinas *alterity* and a host of others. All of these history according to the Conciliar Fathers will help the student develop a thorough search for the truth and apply it in his day-to-day living. This is where the student’s own effort comes in. They are expected to draw useful implications from the wealth of philosophical speculation because the riches or gain of philosophy is when it makes humanity to take rational decisions in life.

These essentials of philosophy to human formation can be summarily outlined as follows:

- 1. Philosophy helps the individual and some religious leaders to analyze dogmatic issues in theology;** Dogmas in theology are not totally devoid of reason. This explains why the medieval thinkers and other early Fathers of the Church used the methods and logical techniques of the ancient philosophers to address difficult theological questions and points of doctrine like the Trinity, Holy

Eucharist, and Incarnation and so on. Thomas Aquinas following Peter Damian argued that philosophy is the handmaiden of theology (*ancilla theologiae*). St. Augustine's *Credo ut intelligiam* (*Believe so that you may understand*), which St. Anselm also adopted in his *faith seeking understanding*. Commenting on this, *Ratio Fundamentallis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* states that "*philosophy is at the service of faith seeking understanding for the ultimate aim of carrying out the mission of Christ on earth*"³⁰ On this view, reason by itself is not good enough to give us proper religious knowledge, instead, we have to begin with faith to set us in the right direction and, once we believe in God through faith, we can seek to understand the foundations of our belief through reason. It is not new that the early Church faced intellectual and cultural ridicule from the Romans and the Greeks. These ridicules threatened internal cohesion within the Church and its evangelistic boldness towards unbelievers.³¹ With the help of the rich tools of philosophy they were able to scale through.

2. Philosophy helps the individual to reason correctly and to apply their thoughts coherently and logically. The study of philosophy helps the individual to be critical in his dealings and also to avoid errors in speech and in writing. It is this character of criticality of philosophy that makes us question everything before accepting it as true knowledge. In this regard, philosophy helps to remove ambiguity, thereby bringing out the clarifications of thought.

3. Philosophy facilitates self-knowledge. The worst thing that will happen to a person is when he lacks self-identity. Self-knowledge matters a lot. This is what necessitates his ambition to set up the goals he wishes to achieve. Following the Socratic imperative 'man know thyself', knowing oneself, means examining oneself; *for the unexamined life is not worth living*. Philosophy will help the individual to constantly ask the following existential questions 'who am I? Where have I come from and where am I going?'

4. Philosophy helps the individual in Ecumenical Dialogues/Interreligious dialogues. In his encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*, Pope John Paul II made it clear that philosophy is of incalculable importance. He speaks of the influence philosophy has on the development of culture, and on personal and social behavior. He declared, “Philosophical thought is often the only ground for understanding and dialogue with those who do not share our faith.”³² Epistemic justice calls for an understanding of the faith of others so as to be able to relate with them. It will be an epistemic injustice to judge other religious groups from afar.

5. Philosophy enables the individual to prudently change or enhance some fundamental beliefs. It is an existential fact that most of the things we do or even the way we interpret our experiences are based on our fundamental beliefs. It is therefore the task of the priest using the rich tools of philosophy to question those beliefs that are not in agreement with the rationality of the human person. Any belief that is found guilty before the ‘Court of Reason’ is bound to be discarded or improved upon. Philosophy, therefore, helps to shape and sharpen our mental faculty³³.

6. Philosophy frees the individual from dogmatism. By dogmatism, I mean being imprisoned by thought or narrow-mindedness. Philosophy disposes us not to accept anything without rational justification. In this sense, philosophy frees the human person from the imprisonment of the prejudices derived from common sense, from habitual beliefs of our age and our environment, from culture and from our spontaneous convictions. One important aspect of philosophy is that it makes us to stand out in the midst of the crowd. It provides us with intellectual independence.³⁴

The Relevance of Philosophy to the Contemporary World

The relevance of philosophy to our contemporary world cannot be over emphasized since its importance is geared towards making the society a better place. Now, every state is characterized by its economic, social, religious and politics. Philosophy can help to

cushion some horrendous effects. Of all those who explain the relevance of philosophy to the society, J.O. Ejikemeuwa Ndubisi is more wholistic because his thought on the matter bothers on both the social, religious, economic and the political sphere of the society.³⁵ The assertions below are products of his findings.

Philosophy and Cross-Culturalism: The reality of numerous cultures with their idiosyncrasies more often than not causes rift. However, philosophy is necessary to combat actions of war and conflict among people of different backgrounds. In our world of today where there are people of different races and nationalities, different ideological and religious orientations, there is the need to make sense of the whole quagmire. It is unfortunate that the society in which we live in recognizes those they feel are from their locality. For instance, where the white man feels at home with only his fellow white man, or a black man feeling same about his fellow blacks. There is a kind of natural hatred of one race or group against another.

This is where the study of philosophy plays a major role. Our knowledge of substance and accidents in metaphysics (a branch of philosophy) shows that every human person shares one substance – the humanity of the human person. The humanness of the white man or the black man or as evident in the different ethnic groups in Nigeria, the Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Efik or Ijaw is not lesser or higher than the humanness of the Fulani, Tiv, Idoma, Esan or Egede as the case may be. We all share one humanity. The fact that one is a white man or a black man or Igbo, Yoruba or Hausa is simply accidental to the being of the individual person. In this regard, therefore, the study of philosophy will certainly play a vital role to unite all communities of the world together.

Philosophy and the Political Sphere of the Society: The society cannot be devoid of political influence. In fact, some scholars say everything is *politicized*. With this they mean that one cannot separate politics from the happenings of the world. Be that as it may, it is important to state that in history the world has experienced different political dispensations. It is true that the human person is a political animal but it is also true that politics as it is being practiced

in the different countries cannot grow or even develop without the aid of philosophy. Our politicians need at least a little dose of philosophy in order to be truly rational in all their dealings. J. Ndubisi affirmed that “In the political sphere, a dose of philosophy, especially, is necessary to enable us to appreciate our political heritage. The fact that “ideas rule the world” points to the practical role philosophy plays or should play in the politics of the world. It takes a good dose of philosophy for one to understand and evaluate the essential needs of one’s people”.³⁶

The role of philosophy in the political sphere will be much more appreciated in the area of policy-making. Philosophers or rather those who have had some training in philosophy are better equipped to help the government to articulate good policies that will touch the lives of the people positively. Philosophy can help Nigerian Politicians to desist from the politics of acrimony and bitterness. Since philosophy upholds the dignity of human nature, politicians will certainly benefit from it given that it will dispose them to be fair in all their dealings. Ndubisi holds that Philosophy certainly will help all to be true citizens and to have regard for the constituted authority.³⁷

Philosophy and Religious Pluralism: Philosophy has a major role to play in the way and manner religion is understood and practiced in our world. Ndubisi holds that from our knowledge of metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics, we learnt that everything that is, derived its being from the being that is by necessity. This being that is by necessity is what religious people call God. This is a simple philosophical knowledge. The implication of this understanding is that there is only one Supreme Being that is approached differently³⁸.

He went further to state that, the knowledge of philosophy will help the contemporary world to appreciate the fact that each of us is unique and as such every religion is unique. It is philosophy that should help us to respect the views of others, be it religious or otherwise. Basic philosophical knowledge will make Christians, Moslems and Traditional Worshipers in the world to tolerate each other without any form of violence or hatred. Since philosophy is

the love of wisdom, it will dispose us to appreciate the good aspects of each religious group in the world. In this regard, Christians and Moslems are to see themselves as collaborators and not as enemies.³⁹

Philosophy and Economic Development/Viability: Ndubisi holds that economic development has to do with the production and distribution of goods and services for the good of human society. Philosophy has what it takes to develop the economy of every state. Philosophy, we must recall, is a reflective activity. It takes only a reflective mind to bring about economic growth and development. It will not be an overstatement to say, for instance, that Nigerian economic problem is hinged on the lack of philosophical training. It is clear that when the mind is developed, it will certainly affect other aspects of human endeavor.

According to him (Ndubisi), ‘Philosophy may not be a practical study or of immediate practical utility, but it contains what is finest and noblest in human life, because it is concerned not with the production of material wealth, but with the advancement of the wealth of the mind. One thing that is clear is that a developed mind translates to developed economy.⁴⁰ He went further to state that there is a close relationship between a philosopher and an entrepreneur. A good philosopher is a good entrepreneur. Entrepreneurship has to do with the process of generating ideas and venturing into business risks for the purpose of making profits. It takes only a reflective mind to generate ideas; and it also takes a reflective mind to actualize these ideas. Philosophy has to do with creativity. This is what the society needs. We need philosophy to sharpen our creative minds for the purpose of economic growth and development in the world. This will bring us to Philosophy of Economics which has to do with inquiries concerning rational choice, appraisal of economic outcomes, institutions and processes and the ontology of economic phenomena.⁴¹

Philosophy and Scientific Inventions: The contemporary world is said to be a digital world. Many scientific inventions have been explored to bring about ease in the society. This explains why people

feel the sciences are the ‘saviour’ of the society. Indeed, the sciences have been seen as the redeemer of mankind. However, it is important to note that the sciences are able to thrive because they employed philosophical tools. In other words, *philosophy asks the questions for which sciences or scientists find the answers and thrive*. There is no scientific invention that is devoid of speculation, there is none that does not require analysis, and there is none that is devoid of prescription. These are important methods of philosophy. I guess this is why in the ancient times philosophers were called scientists.

Conclusion

It suffices to state therefore that the relevance of philosophy to nation building will help to jettison the erroneous belief that philosophy does not bake bread. ***For me, philosophy does not only bake bread but also, butters the bread.*** The misconception of philosophy that we see and hear these days are wont to be dismissed and discountenanced as abstruse and recondite. Philosophy, as traditionally understood, is the study, by the use of reason, of the deepest realities. It deals with the nature of the material world, the nature of man, the existence of God. It defends our capacity to know the truth and explores the transcendental of truth, goodness, and beauty. It explains the way of life that rational beings should follow. In the study of logic, it prepares and strengthens the mind to analyze arguments, and distinguish truth from falsity.

ENDNOTES

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