

Philosophy of Education as an accidental trickle from outside schools of education.

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Abstract

This paper recalls a Thomistic *dictum quidquid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur* to the effect that, somewhat, everything is received in the manner of the recipient, and which, for the purposes of the paper shall be rendered to signify that the operations of any thing – *en, entis* – cannot exceed its nature, and at the level of particulars would mean that the capabilities of any thing cannot exceed those of its essence. Thus, the *dictum* only served as a reminder to the fact that we know as much of reality as our predispositions allow, and once we have had our “fill,” its effect cannot possibly exceed it as cause. Based on an Aristotelean-Thomistic-Gilsonian philosophical framework, and employing an anecdotic, hypothetical quasi scenario-building methodology to visit learning and teaching of philosophy of education and the career-building in the field at our universities, it attempts, through again, a quasi Socratic method, to intimate that the effects cannot possibly exceed their causes, and so, in Africa and in the world at large, philosophy of education will yield as much progress as that of its teachers as its causes and principles. Positively put, the paper argues that, at a first order philosophical introspection, philosophy of education is begrudgingly and accidentally being generated outside the university schools of education and that it trickles out in similar manner into them, and, a more metaphysical look will yet reveal a law of necessity in the process, so that, Africa and the entire world, as is the case with globalization, drifts towards a deeper and a more universal human liberation and development. Thus, the same transcendental necessity rules our campuses, so that, human development will take place in Africa anyway, but, if a proactive programme was required, application of intellectual probity at our campuses should cause due human development.

Introduction.

If indeed the Third Annual CUEA Philosophy conference will achieve the purpose of raising “the level of discussion of Philosophy of education in Africa” and to ask “how relevant the educational systems in Africa” are to “the contemporary African situation,” as stated in the Call of Papers, it would seem necessary to first assess the state of philosophy of education in Africa. The achievement of that purpose is a tall order especially when the specificity of the “problem statement” in the Call of Papers is not in itself too helpful. To begin with, if it is practically difficult to assess the true status of philosophy of education at our Kenyan universities, one can imagine the daunting task it would entail in order to significantly arrive at the status of philosophy of education in Africa. Nor is it a mean task to go beyond that blurred description referred to as “the contemporary African situation” without being desperately frustrated by that

“situation: is. However, perhaps the open-endedness of the statement of the purpose of the conference can be seen as a huge net cast out to the four winds in order to capture as many and divergent intellectual idiosyncrasies as possible. It would seem necessary to point out what perspective acted as “bait” that draw me into the “net.” In this regard, my essay responds to an assumed invitation to discuss the contribution of philosophy to educational theory and practice towards human development in Africa; that was my understanding of the issue that the conference intended to achieve. Later in the paper, I allude to my understanding of philosophy as a discipline that seeks the “truth,” human development as change for what is “better” and education as knowledge that is both a process and a product towards the achievement of that progress. My paper therefore tries to interrogate not only the alignment of philosophy of education towards human development but its efficacy to do so. The question paused is, “Are our universities, and by extension, our departments of philosophy and of philosophy of education, capable of inspiring development in Africa?”

I employ a quasi-Socratic method consisting of an hypothetical discussion I had with a visiting South Korean forty-seven year old philosophy of education lecturer, Professor Yung Lee during the last one and half years.. I call it “quasi” because, unlike with the Socratic questioning,” I merely present Prof. Lee’s observations in a dialogue very much like the style of Plato in *The Republic*. Prof. Lee obtained a B. Sc. Degree in Automotive Engineering from the largest Korean university, The State University of Seoul, before he moved to the University of Bologna in Italy for a B.A. and M.A. in Philosophy. He proceeded to Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE) where he obtained a Ph. D. specializing in philosophy of education fifteen years ago where he has been lecturing since. Prof. Lee has been at the Uritia University of Africa (UUA) here in Nairobi for his sabbatical leave but has extended it by six months. Though stationed at UUA, he has been very keen to acquaint himself with the other universities in the region and his observations and insights could shed some light into the present discussion. Prof. Lee is my colleague at UUA in the department of Educational foundations.

The foundation of this hypothetical discussion lies in my experiences at Kenyatta University where I did my M.Ed., and as an adjunct lecturer of philosophy of Education and Philosophy of Teaching at the University of Nairobi, an adjunct lecturer at of Philosophy of Education and History of Education at CUEA and Spanish lecturer at USIU. Thus the dialogues with Prof. Lee are not derived from one institution in particular but they rather represent what those familiar with our universities would presumably resonate with. Prof. Lee’s background is significant because it strands several continents.

There is no pretension in this paper to rely on authority to support arguments, and therefore citations are kept to a minimum. We rely more in the traditional

method of philosophy which is introspection and logical argumentation. ¹

Perhaps we can briefly justify our methodology. Dialogues with Prof. Lee provide a “phenomenological platform” from which I transcend into proper philosophical discussion, and therefore wish to provide a practical example of how the phenomenological and the transcendental can co-penetrate into each other. More significantly, we did not want to produce a “ceremonial” paper full of what Alfred Whitehead called “inert ideas” or what our mediaeval predecessors called “*flatus vocis*” – mere sound. If philosophy has to impel development in Africa, it is important that we do true philosophy at our African universities. An example is how globalization is tossing children from Africa to any imaginable spot on the globe, and so, it cannot be serious practical philosophical insight that restricts our analysis to Africa except for the simple reason of starting “somewhere.”

The status of philosophy of education in Kenya and in Africa is presented through those dialogues with Prof. Yung Lee that cover various aspects such as evaluation, content, quality of faculty and recruitment, etc. Again, Kenya and Africa are used in these dialogues as mere “phenomenological locus” just as Greece and Athens were to Aristotle.

Evaluation.

Prof. Lee tells me that his first window into the quality of philosophy of education at UUA was through involvement with the evaluation process. At UUA, he has been one of the five lecturers of philosophy of education. Normally, we divide the work load among ourselves. We have had very large groups so that at times, he has had more than two hundred students at a time. Assessment tools are commonly prepared.

“When it is minimum requirement of a term paper to have fifteen double-spaced pages, a heap of two hundred plus copies can be very threatening indeed. But I did not know that a more frightening ordeal was yet to come; the quality of those papers. One has to see it in order to believe it!” Even though in a number of cases he had observed how students did not even know how to construct sentences or how to create proper paragraphs, he was not so much disturbed by the structural quality of the work as by the quality of its content. I pressed him to substantiate. “Having studied philosophy at a traditionally “continental” university like Bologna, the very definition of what philosophy meant made student assessment difficult for me at first.¹ I had to start accepting terms like “general” and “technical” philosophy that I had never come across before, or that Nyerere was a great “philosopher” around this region. “Surely,” he went on to explain, “one is better off not knowing a vacuous definition such as philosophy being “a rational inquiry into fundamental issues of life,” and yet this is the definition given by

¹ Mondin, B. *Philosophical Anthropology: An Impossible Project?* Reprinted 1998. Bangalore: theological Publications in India.1985.

almost all my students! Of course I would wonder which “study” was not a “rational inquiry”?

Now, in an effort to uphold the pride of my university and that of my country, I complained to Prof. Lee not to make such broad generalizations. “You have just marked the term papers, continuous assessment tests (CATs) and examinations of the continuing education students; our “regular” students produce very good work,” I observed. That was during the first few months of Prof. Lee’s stay in the country. My argument fell through when soon, he had taught and evaluated the regular students as well.

Philosophical content.

“Yes Mwaniki,” he would counter, “the physical aspect of work turned in by regular students is certainly much superior, but unfortunately the content is not only exactly the same but, through these brighter students, that content’s meaning also gains clearer relief. It is not easy for me to see, for example, how “functions” of philosophy “generated” the “four methods” of philosophy. I cannot blame the students for not being able to see through the philosophical difficulties introduced by those four methods when the original work where they were developed does not envision any difficulty whatsoever.² Wouldn’t the four “dimensions of education” that ensue from the four methods or from similar derivation presuppose the same difficulties? Hardly surprising at all because both the “methods” and the “dimensions” have R. S. Peter’s (1966) method of linguistic analysis as their foundation, and yet we thought all along that Aldestein’s work of 1971 had discredited R. S. Peter’s method conclusively enough!”³

With such potent arguments I was left horrified at what would happen if those arguments were clearly heard and understood in Kenya and in Eastern Africa where the “four methods” and the “four dimensions of education” have been dogmatically preached and observed for more than twenty years now! Wouldn’t the entire philosophy of education edifice come tottering down? What Prof. Lee had to say next left me extremely ashamed and worried about what would happen if the world “out there” came to know what he found most preposterous, not just about the four methods and dimensions but about the existence at our

² These methods are developed in Njoroge, R. J. & Bennaars, G. A. *Philosophy and Education in Africa*. Second reprint. Nairobi: Transafrica Press, 1986. The authors start by attributing four functions to “technical philosophy,” namely, rational, critical, phenomenological and speculative. From these functions, four methods of philosophy bearing the same titles are “transposed.” Using linguistic analysis, and from R. S. Peter’s three criteria of education, four “dimensions” of education are derived.

³ Peters, R. S. *Ethics and Education*. London: Routledge, 1966. Aldestein, D.L. *The Wisdom and Wit of R. S. Peters*. London: The Union Society, 1971.

departments of such a thing as “prescriptive” and “descriptive” methods of philosophy as well. As Prof. Lee observes, the students inability to question the logic of such “methods” reveals yet another very subtle quality about them. Yet it was clear that the students had not invented those methods because every “good” student enumerated them, and what is even more telling was to find the same methods in examination sheets as well!

Having had a “continental” training in philosophy myself, it was easy to appreciate somewhat the sentiments of this young Asian professor, but he needed to understand the history of philosophy of education in our country, and indeed, in Eastern Africa. It might be understandable perhaps that, meeting philosophy for the first time, newcomers to this “discipline’ in the 1980s would faithfully adhere to the founders’ teaching without questioning, and that, after a whole twenty-five years now of churning out such graduates, “the following” must now consist of a large body spread all over the region. Indeed, the ideas Prof. Lee finds spurious such as the definition of philosophy being a “rational inquiry...,” division of philosophy into “general” and technical philosophy” or the methods of philosophy, have become a truly “Kenyan philosophy of education tradition” so that when anyone comes questioning it, he or she sounds genuinely heretical! Of course, it has not been easy to explain this “logic” to Prof. Lee especially when he wonders why there has not been any one among those “followers” who may have “ventured” outside the founders’ territory, and what had happened when they did.

There are a multitude of disturbing observations by Prof. Lee that cannot be documented here because of space and relevance for now, but three issues regarding the evaluation process cannot be omitted. For example, Prof Lee got himself very surprised the other day about how teachers-to-be, especially at degree level, could leave the university without any inkling whatsoever about the so called “problems of knowledge” and how the only idea they seemed to have come across in this regard was that of knowledge being “justified true belief,” a definition they all attributed to Scheffler (1965) little knowing that it goes as far back to the times of Plato.⁴ Neither through psychology nor through philosophy of education have the students met by Prof. Lee obtained any deeper theory about “ways of knowing” beyond “conditioning,” nor did they have any clue about “problems of knowing” that one would find in any basic writing on Critical Thinking. The metaphysical significance of all these pertinent issues of knowledge flew way above those students’ radar and yet the main commodity that a teacher “sells” – peddles - is “knowledge.”

The second and third concerns of Prof. Lee relate to the enormous

⁴Scheffler, I. (1965). *The Conditions of Knowledge: An Introduction to Epistemology and Education*. Glenview, Illinois – Foresman & Co.

In order to appreciate this point more, one could refer to [Everson, Stephen (ed.). *Companion to Ancient Thought: 1: Epistemology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p4.]

understatement about what metaphysics and ethics were. His observation has been that metaphysics, theodicy and religion were totally indistinguishable in the minds of his students at UUA and ontology was equated to empirical sciences combined. According to the Asian professor, the students, having crammed what "teleological theories" and "deontological theories" were, these remain just that, "a set of axiological theories" whose relevance in real life had not yet been contemplated. He observes, "It has bewildered me why the theories of the empirical psychologists L. Kohlberg and J. Piaget seem, from my assessment of the students' output, to have obscured those of profound and "more" philosophical thinkers like W. F. Froebel (1782 – 1852), J. H. Herbart (1776 – 18881), Lev Vygotsky (1891 – 1934), Jerome Brunner (1915 +), Mia Kellmer Pringle (1920 – 1983), not to mention philosophers like John Locke." By this time I was getting wary at defending what seemed indefensible. Hadn't I been assessment the same examination scripts Prof. Lee had been assessing and from which he drew all these observations? Wasn't it unfortunate that what he was saying about theodicy, ontology and religion being equated, just as his observation about "ethical theories" was true? Wasn't it also true that Bennaars, Freire, Nyerere, Piaget, Kholberg, Dewey and Socrates more than exhausted the gamut of Philosophers" our students had come across?

The third issue, an observation of Prof. Lee, and perhaps more important in this regard, is his evidence about cheating in examinations and about plagiarising by students without any effort to disguise the malpractice. "It hasn't been easy for me to make out whether what I have observed from time to time is a result of massive cheating or cramming of notes devoid of personal mental processing. I have continued seeing responses from a number of students, running sometimes to even two pages that were exactly the same, word for word, paragraph by paragraph and often including the examples as well. I was frightened at the possibility of the examination having either been leaked out or having been taught to a group beforehand.'

"As I document the issue regarding evaluation, I recall another worrying aspect narrated to me by another colleague of ours," he continued. It was about the quality of the examination tools themselves. She had complained about how, in the examinations at our department at UUA, the four levels of evaluation - recall, comprehension, evaluation and application - were either not evident beyond the first one, were misplaced or were frivolous. The same colleague recalls how, at the previous university where she had lectured and where she had at first got quite impressed by the fact that "moderation" of examinations existed and seemed to be a serious affair, her head of department had questioned how relevant concepts "culture" and "globalization" were to the concept "education. I agreed with the general point she wanted to make to the effect that moderation without intellectual, moral and professional probity can be an exercise in futility.

I myself had had similar experiences as Prof. Lee's; I had complained about them, but not very successfully. I wanted to hear from him how far he himself had

reached, officially, with the issue of cheating in examinations, plagiarising and with the multitude of criticisms he had made. Had he discussed these with relevant authorities or shared them with other colleagues as I had done myself, and what had been his experience? "Surely, you must have shared all these experiences with the supervisors or with other colleagues here," I plodded.

At this, he looked straight into my eyes for what looked like a long time before saying anything, perhaps wondering how to answer me. "At this stage I agree with you because, whenever I have raised the pertinent issues discussed with you, be it with a colleague, in a group, or at a meeting - and this is the most painful part of my experience during the time I have been around here - you are right, I am treated like a heretic! I would have minded less if there was furry, an outburst or an explanation, but again, the most discomfoting reaction is that nobody bothers to respond; I am often met with silence or a change of topic as if I had said nothing. Thereafter, I become isolated. It is a kind of mediaeval ex-communication! Thanks Mwaniki for being there for me to exchange ideas and experiences because I would have been a very lonely man around as far as my work at the university is concerned. Of course you know that outside the university I have had lots of fun".

Prof. Lee was not telling anything new, only I thought that as a visitor to the country and to our university, he would have received a different treatment from me. It is in the nature of things to go "wrong" from time to time and to tend to disorder. That is why there are governments and administration offices, part of whose job it is to either prevent wrong-doing from happening or to intervene when it happens. Nor can one be blamed when those in "government" are ignorant about some wrong-doing. However, there is deep frustration, as is the case with Prof. Lee, when, the effort to redress the wrong-doing by calling "attention" to it, is not only treated as if an oath taken by a dangerous cartel has been broken but also the "orthodoxy" continues being entrenched! As Prof. Lee and I observe, it is painful when one becomes a "heretic" where one has a full time employment or where one had hopes of career progression. Thankfully, Prof. and I were not in this latter predicament. Ours was to wonder how deeply and extensively the cancer had spread at UUA, among Kenyan universities and even internationally, and to ponder about possible remedies. We have been trying to transcend the "phenomenological level" in order to "philosophize" about it.

Quality of teaching and faculty.

Regarding the quality of teaching, a lot can be written but what is pertinent right now is an observation about how, the first thing that struck Prof. Lee in this respect was not just the huge number of students attending a lecture at once as the fact that there was hardly any "lecturing" at all taking place; most "lectures" at UUA were actually a "note -taking" or a "note - giving" exercise. As if he had read my mind he adds, "Mwaniki, I have done my homework. It is not just at UUA that his happens; it is a common practice at most Kenyan universities. In fact, I was booted down the first time I told my students to learn to understand

the arguments of my lecture and then summarise them to make their own notes. I had to insist that they do it and thankfully, they soon got used to it and even liked it." We consoled each other with the observation that in universities in more "advanced" countries, the same phenomenon was disguised in form of references to some Internet link or in form of copious handouts, but certainly there, there was, generally speaking, some effort to "lecture." It would be unfair to blame our university "lecturers" without giving some background because, before 1980s there used to be true lectures and tutorials in Kenya or rather, before the advent of "double intake" of the early 1990s brought about by the then President Daniel Arap Moi's regime. With that double intake, the number of students was generally very large and lectures were moved to huge halls to accommodate as many as five hundred students at a go. Loudspeakers had to be used - and are still being used. Lecturers had to resort to dictating notes, a practice that has not changed to date.

I must confess that, most of the time Prof. Lee and I have had our debates and sharing, justified or not, I perceived some kind of bias on his part against the quality of our "local" lecturers and I often had to pre-empt that tendency with an argument or justification of some kind. I have just offered one about the history of "note-giving. I would catch myself saying something like "Well Prof., I am not sure you are going to find better prepared lecturers than ours elsewhere." Even though the truth in his observations has been often unassailable, I have been "consoled" by his agreeing with me that, by and large, not many universities would boast of doing things very differently; because, as we shall discuss later, the recruitment process worldwide is very much similar, and secondly, there is a background explanation about how we got to this level ourselves, and that, with globalisation, there is a generalised uniformity of education systems with every passing day.

At this particular point, it would be pertinent to document an observation we have often shared with Prof. Lee, namely, one thinks that a university is a centre of intellectual excellence until one gets inside it. I like the way Prof. Lee puts it: "The greatest liberation of going through the university is to become freed from the old myth that the greatest minds are at the university!" Apparently, Prof. Lee has interviewed a good number of my colleagues about their career paths and he gives me the example of Willis. "Willis obtained a "B-" at the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Examination (KCSE) and as he himself says, he failed to be admitted into his dream careers such as medicine and pharmacy and was "given" his last choice, B. Ed. (Arts) at UUA, with Biology and Physical Education (P.E.) as his future teaching subjects. Having obtained an Upper Second Class Honours degree at the end of the three years, he hardly stayed outside of the university after graduation because, his new dream now was to become a lecturer, and as he observed: "Since I had not wanted to become a teacher in the first case - I find it demeaning - a lesser "evil" was to become a lecturer which was a bit more prestigious. He proceeded to obtain a M. Ed. degree at the same university because, with a reputation of being a difficult masters option, there were not only

fewer applicants but there was also an offer of scholarships. As we talk now, Willis has a doctorate with specialisation in philosophy of education. As you know, he is lecturing here with us. I would not be wrong to say that most lecturers here have very similar career paths, but I have observed that, until very recently, a good number of lecturers obtained their doctorates from abroad."

"He is really a charming guy who gets on well with both the students and colleagues, isn't he?"

"True but that charm typically conceals what has killed our universities worldwide!"

"Please explain."

"As you know, Willis is a very good friend of mine; actually, of ours. Perhaps you will recall what he told us about his M. Ed. and Ph. D. studies." I seemed to have forgotten so I asked Prof. to remind me. "In short, he did not care what the topic of his thesis or dissertation was because what mattered was what the supervisors wanted - and, according to him, some told him expressly that they had no time with serious topics that required a lot of reading and thinking."

"Oh, yes, he does not make secret about how very often, he was advised to finish his post-graduate studies first and then he could undertake critical writing once he was done with them!. But we must give him some credit for knowing how to observe academic rituals!"

"That's right. Everybody knows, as has become the *dictum* worldwide that, in the academic world, they say –you either publish or die - and so, the path to promotion is publishing, which does not necessarily question the quality of what is published. And if one goes by the stories Willis recounts to us, one's work is most likely to be published depending on whether one is "connected" or not! Besides Mwaniki, from the experience you and I have had, do you know many of our colleagues who have the time and mind for serious and pertinent reflection?"

"And this is international, isn't it?"

"Yes it is. As you know, there is a lot of talk about scholars in more "advanced" countries being quite "advanced" in this as well!"

"Meaning what?"

"I do not have to go very far to illustrate what I mean. You will recall that research that was undertaken jointly by University of Nairobi and Cambridge University not a long time ago meant to find a vaccine for HIV-AIDS, and how, when all the ground work had been done - researching and carrying out trials with the prostitutes from the Nairobi slums, to the shock of the Kenyan team, their Cambridge counterparts had already claimed exclusive ownership to the findings? Of course, that is high order plagiarism. In fact, the most distinguishing mark of "quality" between Third World and the West lies in the latter knowing how to act dirty but being clever enough to know not only how to conceal it but also being smart enough to deodorize it! People from the Third World in general are still basking in pristine innocence and simplicity" I personally thought that was too harsh a description for both sides but the point had been made clearly enough.

The ceremonial role of education.

Prof. Lee and I have coined the expression "the ceremonial role of education" to describe the phenomenon often found at our universities and which I have just documented. A ceremony is a set of rites or rituals, and a "ritual" or "rite" is "a strictly ordered traditional method of conducting and performing an act of worship or other solemn ceremony" (Watson, 1968). Some key characteristics of a ceremony include strict observance of details, solemnity and tradition; it is passed on. From a philosophical perspective, a ceremony is a symbol, and as happens with all symbols, they are as useful in so far as they do not obscure or diminish the role of the "signified." The use of the term "ceremonial" between Prof. Lee and I was to describe the case where the signifier seemed to totally obscure the signified. Nowhere was this case more evident at our universities than in the treatment of "scholarly writing" such as theses, dissertations and "academic" papers. Here, nothing is more sacred than details of format or style, whether it is APA, MLA or CMS or whether the styles had strictly been observed or not. One soon discovers that the content of writing is of the least consequence, so long as, again, it was presented with ceremonial solemnity.⁵ Moving up the career progression too is a matter of how smart one is with ceremonial observance.

I cannot help mentioning the issue of citing authorities in academic writing here because of the proportion ceremonial significance it has taken. We know that, currently, the most recent a citation was, and the more of it, the better. The epistemological significance where evidence from authority in the remote past used to be the weakest to vouch for truth is no more. Thus, St. Thomas of Aquinas, to the young monk John who had asked Aquinas to teach him how to study, explained in a short treatise, gave the admonition, "heed what is said but not by whom it is said."⁶ According to Prof. Lee, that admonition could not have been more necessary and urgent than it is today. This is a good example of how the signifier could have taken untold proportion compared to the signified.⁷

Or take the case where students are constantly admonished about how important it is to be "creative" and "critical" - which, as we all know, characterises an "A-student. But very soon, the cleverer students learn that that admonition is only "a recital" in a "ceremony" called a "lecture;" and that in all assessments, one had better produce, word for word, that the lecturer "dictated." The higher one goes the more one should learn not to be creative or critical, as already observed. As Prof. Lee said earlier, that is how people like Willis have "climbed" so fast, advising Prof. not to be "too clever" at meetings because, these fora are to rubber-stump the inclinations of the chair.

⁵ The style used in this paper will more often than not be labelled "journalistic," and with that "calling a dog by its name, it is hanged!"

⁶ The title of the short one-page treatise from which large books have been written cannot be readily recalled.

⁷ In writing this in no way do I underrate the importance of citations. It certainly forestalls "re-inventing the wheel" and it adduces the "authority" of a "wise" person, among others

At no time is the “ceremonial role of education” more publicly proclaimed than in present day graduation ceremonies. The story of one Vice Chancellor from an African country, not many years ago, deciding to literally “dish out” first class honours to his tribesmen to facilitate their joining the faculty as his spies is an open secret. Nor is it a secret any more that, with computer knowledge becoming almost universal, forging of university degree certificates may not be uncommon; one reads of such episodes in newspapers from time to time. The point made here refers to the “ceremonial role of education” symbolised by graduation ceremonies. Even when the certificate has not been forged, if what Prof. Lee observes has some truth in it, the signified knowledge claimed by it may have undergone massive depreciation. Secondly, its traditional second signified, the career value, has become more and more uncertain a promise; graduate unemployment has been with us for more than twenty years now.⁸ The words of conferment of a degree as being empowered to “read and write what appertains...” cannot be more satirical or more accurate, for, to those who discover the truth fast enough, graduation is the moment to begin the search for true knowledge!

What philosophy is.

I rest our on-going sharing with Prof. Lee for another day.. For now, I wish to relate that sharing with the topic at hand, namely, whether and how philosophy could enhance education in Africa and how this in turn can bring about human development.

It should not be terribly difficult to argue for the fact that, ultimately, philosophy seeks truth, or at least argue that "traditionally" that is what it has sought. I shall rely on the poetic beauty contained in the etymology of the definition of philosophy as "love of wisdom", for, if, as Aristotle and St. Thomas of Aquinas say, wisdom is the knowledge of things through their most ultimate and most universal causes and principles, then, what is more agreeable than the Pythagorean inference when he observed: if that were the meaning of wisdom, who would possibly be wise but a god? As Pythagoras rightly concluded, we can only be "lovers of wisdom." That being the case, "ultimate" and "universal" causation being possible at the speculative level, wisdom, and therefore, philosophy, have been, from the early beginnings of philosophy, speculative.⁹ Even though philosophy starts at the "phenomenological phase," the sublime in philosophy lies in the transcendental phase. And as Mondin observes,

Philosophical anthropology [philosophy of man] requires a very complex method, one in which *two principal phases can be distinguished; phenomenological and transcendental.* [Italics are mine]. In the *phenomenological phase*, all data relative to the being of man is assembled; in *the transcendental phase*, the ultimate meaning

⁸ This was subject of my M.Ed. study: Mbogo-Mwaniki. “An Inquiry into the Impact of Employment on Education in the Light of Thomistic Theory of Appetite and Prudence.” *M. Ed Thesis*. Nairobi: Kenyatta University, 2003.

⁹ De Torre, J. *Christian Philosophy*. Manila: Signatara Publishers., 1980; Mondin, B. *Op. Cit*, 1985.

of the data is sought, that profound meaning which confers upon the data a meaning and renders this same data possible... therefore, through the transcendental method, we seek to re-ascend from human action to the ontological conditions which make this action possible; that is, we seek to re-ascend from the action to the being of man.¹⁰

But this is really attending to the "formal object" of philosophy. What shall we say is its "material object?" (de Torre, *Op. Cit.*). Following the Aristotelian - Thomistic tradition, the answer would be that the material object of philosophy must be "all reality," "all being" and fundamentally, "truth," because, being, truth, good and beauty are mere perspectives of the same thing (*Ibid.*). A little return to history would perhaps clarify the answer. At the cradle of philosophy, we find Socrates, Plato and Aristotle worried about the defence of "ethical truth" that had been threatened by the Parmenidian - Heraclitian controversy of the sixth Century BCE regarding "change" and from the little seriousness the Sophists regarded truth (Shand, 1994). At the heart of what worried the greatest fathers of philosophy was the epistemological relativity that would necessarily generate ethical relativism (*Ibid.*). Thus, from the very beginning, the necessary interdependence between the four branches of philosophy can be discerned. The point here is that, central to philosophy from the beginning was the concern for "truth." Thus, etymologically and historically, philosophy seeks the truth.

Meaning of human progress.

My next concern now is to explain the meaning of human development. I shall not rely on "authorities" but on metaphysical and the very etymology of the terms "human" and "development." I shall take the terms "development" and "progress" to be synonymous, and that, as Aristotle would say, "all are agreed" that by progress is meant "a movement forward" just as the word "development" connotes "growth," both should then mean "a change for better." From a metaphysical perspective both terms connote "change" as "actualisation of a potency" and therefore, ultimately, they refer to an "increment of being." (de Torre, *Op. Cit.*). But, if, being, truth, unity, good and beauty - the transcendental properties of any "thing" - are one and the same thing, then "increment of being" which is progress, must mean "increment of good."

I now need to discuss the meaning of the adjective "human" in "human development" or "human progress." I will follow the thread from the previous paragraph. If human progress means an increment in the transcendental properties of any thing, then, this increment must be "of human" or in relation to "human." Now, the Aristotelian - Thomistic - Gilsonean tradition entertains no doubt whatsoever that what makes human beings "essentially" human is their "rationality," a concept that includes reason and will.¹¹ Getting straight into the

¹⁰ Mondin, *Op. Cit.* , p7 -21.

¹¹ Three thinkers are named to define a tradition yet they lived at very different times: Aristotle in the fourth century BC, Thomas in the thirteenth century of our era and Etienne Gilson, in our times; he died in 1979. the reason is that, if it is true that Aristotle gets to the West through Boethius of the fourth century AD, and

marrow of the argument, human progress entails increment in being through the possession of a good that is known, meaning, a good that is reasoned and willed or chosen freely.¹²

For the purpose of this paper, it does not seem necessary yet to enter into a deep analysis of the concept education. Suffice it to state, as we did at the very beginning, that education is the process or/and product towards the achievement of human progress. This process and product is fully expressed in the concept "culture" (Mondin, *Op. Cit.* p145). I shall justify the "necessity" of education towards the end of this paper.

Efficacy of philosophy for progress in Africa.

The most pertinent question at the moment is whether "Philosophy of education in Africa" as it is today can animate "the educational system in Africa" that delivers human progress. My response is that, on the one hand, philosophy of education at our universities can neither animate nor deliver progress for our people, at least not significantly. Nevertheless, philosophy of education outside the confines of the schools of education of our universities is not only driving education systems but that it is also promoting some human progress even though it does so more out of necessity than design.

Now, whether the scenarios described by Prof. Yung Lee were true or not, the true status of philosophy of education at our universities is dictated, first, by why a lecturer becomes a lecturer; his or her intention, because the act of knowing and willing is what is truly human, as discussed earlier. Without getting into the historical process that made this happen, what is clear is that, generally speaking the intention of becoming a lecturer is primarily employment, that is, earning a living, and unless we want to get into "ceremonial" argumentation, the reality on the ground is very much that followed by Willis. Nor am I imputing a negative evaluation of that intention because, the fact of making employment and earning a living a first priority is a post-industrial creation that none of us can easily avoid. Secondly, the scenarios created through dialogue with Prof. Lee serve to demonstrate that, indeed, having made employment first priority the consequences on the ground, though inexcusable, follow. The only claim of this paper in this regard is that that fact must be recognized as such, and having accepted it, we should then not expect lecturers of education to yield a lot more than is possible from them. This is because, the fundamental argument was inspired by the *dictum* "quidquid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur recipientis...", which can be loosely rendered to mean - everything is received in the manner of the recipient, and therefore alluding to the fact that, knowledge, wisdom, the reading of the reality can be accommodated in proportion to each

especially through Averroes and Avicenna in the tenth/eleventh century AD, it was Aquinas who systemized and popularized him as "the philosopher." And in our times, in my opinion, Gilson has been perhaps the most outstanding Thomist....

¹² *S. Th.* Questions 71 – 83 on Moral Act; *S. Th.*, I, Question 75 – 102 on Man; the late Pope John Paul II, 1993, *Veritas et Splendour. S.Th.* refers to the *Summa Theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas.

person's capability. For the sake of this paper, we have turned the saying upside up to render that an effect cannot possibly exceed its cause, and therefore, if it is the lecturers who should "cause" education and development and they themselves do not have "those effects" as their central reason of their work, then they can cause those effects only accidentally or instrumentally much the same way the computer I am using to write this paper produces this paper.

That causative limitation goes a little further than the analogy with the mere mention of "a computer" because, different computers are capable of different effects. Thus, if we go by Prof. Lee's observation that, for example, the prerequisite for recruitment and promotion at our universities is not certainly how much a lecturer loves and seeks the truth, and if as we argued earlier that philosophy's primary task is to seek the truth, then, the most lecturers of philosophy of education will achieve is to generate philosophy but accidentally.

We need to reiterate once again that in no way does this fact demean the career of a philosopher of education as a philosopher of education. It is not only a post-industrial fact of life but also a fact of the history of education, and therefore not unique to philosophy of education (Mbog-Mwaniki, *Op. Cit.*). The "pedagogue" – a teacher - of the Greco-Roman civilization was simply a purveyor of knowledge, not its creator. It may not be therefore surprising that the late Prof. Bennaars, in his last work before his death, following a theme he had started developing in his earlier work, promoted the concept of an educationist being a pedagogue.¹³ Deep reflection shows that, in fact, that "promotion" amounts to belabouring a point because, for reasons not offered by Prof. Bennaars, that is exactly what majority of teachers are, absolute pedagogues. Prof. Bennaars encourages the idea of teachers emulating the ancient pedagogues, that is, as "guides" who took the little boy to and from school and helped him in his studies. The good professor does not however underscore – perhaps because there was no need for it – that the pedagogue in the Roman times was often a Greek slave who was not enjoying the freedom and civilisation of his Roman masters. Isn't the reality on the ground that, teachers in a good number of our Kenyan schools, and especially those in urban areas and in most of Central and Eastern Provinces of Kenya, for example, instruct children who enjoy higher standards of living than them? Isn't this becoming more and more a reality in a number of our Kenyan schools every day? In other words, the reality Prof. Bennaars had been promoting is already a reality in those respects. But Prof. Bennaars goes further to promote commitment and pride in the profession of a pedagogue! In his last work, it was not surprising that the draft copy had a very prominent theme, *The Pedagogy of Care*. (1998).ⁱⁱ It may not be any surprising that the second part of the book's title is "Towards an African Pedagogy" because nowhere is the term more fitting.

¹³ The last work referred to was: Bennaars, G. A. *Schools in Need of Education: Towards an African pedagogy*. Nairobi: Lectrn, 1998. and his earlier work was: *Ethics, Development and Education*. Nairobi: East African Education Publishers, 1993

Now, in this paper, we are dealing with a pedagogue who teaches philosophy of education – a lecturer - , and the point we are making is that he is just that, a pedagogue, and not necessarily a philosopher and need not be one in order to be a pedagogue. And therefore one could argue that dictating notes to students is not totally unexpected of a pedagogue nor is his working for a pay his primary motive for teaching. After all, our lecturer pedagogue is in essence much more dignified than the Greek pedagogue Prof. Bennaars sets as a model who worked only for his meals and shelter and who had no right to having a family. Being a pedagogue, what should not be expected is that such a teacher generates philosophy, and it is clear from Prof. Lee's experience that he had not met any who seemed to have had an inclination towards philosophizing. Prof. Lee's quarrel lies in a pedagogue who seems not to have a good grounding in traditional philosophy yet claims to teach it. In this regard, I have often countered Prof. Lee's complaint with the fact that, just like in the Roman times, the Roman elite did not know much philosophy and often did not know any at all, and so, if the Greek teacher misled his boys, just like the good "anglo-saxonized" elite that we often are, there was no way of it being known by the masters. Besides, the Greek pedagogue was one not because he had passed an interview to become a good "guide" but by virtue of being a captured slave and the only learning he had was that by virtue of being a citizen of Athens, for example.

But how do we excuse the modern, the Kenyan or the African pedagogue, the lecturer in philosophy of education, when he is accused of being a sophist as Prof. Lee tends to quite often do? Can they really be likened to the Greek sophists against whom Socrates, Plato and Aristotle created a whole philosophy?¹⁴ I have an inkling that the basis of Prof. Lee's accusation lies, first in the character of a person who accepts to go through the whole recruitment process, the way Willis and others have done, and of course, in those who carry out recruitment that way; aren't they conscious of blatant cheating and dishonesty for the sake of financial gain, and that way aren't they therefore sophists? My argument has been that it may be understandable for our lecturers to condescend to this way of doing things given the post-industrial times we live in and that which has been entrenched the world over, characterised by a cruel capitalistic money economy and where, unemployment rates are each day higher. At other times I have tried to excuse my colleagues on the basis of ignorance, wondering whether their actions were totally voluntary, because, if voluntary, then there would be culpability and, in which case the accusation of sophism would hold ground. This is not altogether easy to tell. But as Willis explains, isn't the choice NOT to do serious intellectual work during one's student life and choosing to go by the desire to please a lecturer during undergraduate years and a supervisor, during graduate years, not a deliberate process? Or, if we "published" in the journals

¹⁴ Shand, J. *Philosophy and Philosophers: An Introduction to Western Philosophy*. Longman: Penguin Books, 1994.

well aware that what matters is that there be a publication to cite for a promotion and not for the truth it conveys, can that be taken as peddling with truth the way the sophists did? The sophists made money from peddling with the truth; they did not care about whether what they said was true; what mattered was that they won a case for their clients. It would seem that, even though the cases described by Prof. Lee may not involve direct financial gain – and as Prof. Lee cites cases where there has been evident corruption -, the conscious disdain of truth is discernible. Take the case Prof. Lee spoke about where examination or evaluation tools are professionally flawed and the assessment is totally sub-standard, how can this be different from Greek sophism? And how about the silence, the cruel treatment of Prof. Lee as a heretic when he brought the truth to the surface and the cynicism he experienced during his stay here in UUA? Isn't that evidence enough that the players were well aware that they are trading off truth like the sophists did?

I have had another counterclaim against Prof. Lee, namely, that our lecturers would not be the only sophists around and their way of acting is only a manifestation of how the larger society behaves and what it accepts. Indeed, it has become a way of survival. I would even add that it has become “classy” to be a sophist. In fact, I agree with Prof. Lee when he warns me that, my colleagues will obviously describe the way we discuss “these happenings” at our campuses openly and even documenting them as being “unprofessional” or even “childish!” A case in point to show how our lecturers’ way of doing things is just a sub-set of what is happening all around us, is the most recent War against Iraq and the subsequent assassination of Saddam Hussein – for that, in my opinion, is what it amounted to be from the perspective of today when, as has happened, both the USA and Britain have already owned up to there never having been any “Weapons of Mass Destruction” as claimed to be the case at the time. Nothing exposed journalists and Media world over – especially those with international repute – as being sophists than their being the loudest proponents about the existence of those weapons. What we have witnessed in this whole saga over Iraq is a more sophisticated sophism than that of the Greek times with incomparable and untold scale of assassinations and genocides. The fact that these modern sophists have such a vast audience at their command –the entire globe – makes their sophism more immoral, from an Aristotelian perspective. What is even more dangerous about contemporary sophism is that the sophists do not declare themselves to be so but instead, contrary to how the Greek ones did, they wear faces of puritans! Take the case other cases of Enron Corp and World Com scandals as representatives about what happens in the corporate world. Here we saw executives who were extremely classy involved in an extremely sophisticated sophism. Could our lecturers not have been influenced by this sophisticated sophism? Anyway, as long as we do not act differently, any of these conclusions is possible.

Sophists or not, it is the claim of this paper that, if these are some of the characteristics of pedagogues of philosophy of education, as cause, we should not

expect them to possibly generate effects of truth and good except accidentally, just as the sophists of the old must have produced some good but accidentally. I shall explain how accidental effects are possible towards the end of this paper.

How did we get here? The answer has already been intimated by reference to post-industrial reality that has heightened the need for employment and of earning a living as we know it today. In fact, one can perhaps explain the sophism of journalists from the point of view of employment and of the need to earn a living. This explanation was long and tacitly expounded by Hewlett, the well known English Essayist, as to why the English Essay, as a Literature genre died with the birth of the “columnist.”¹⁵ The modern columnist writes to meet a certain deadline, a specific time of the week, month or year, when he just has to produce the article or a “feature.” Under these conditions, he can hardly be a creative writer but he now writes “*necessarily*,” to keep his job. Doesn’t this explanation of Hewlett very neatly explain, perhaps, how we became pedagogues in the first place and how, having become that, how the path to sophism might start beckoning to us?

Philosophy from outside schools of education.

It is now time to justify the claim that indeed, philosophy, and specifically, philosophy of education is happening outside schools of education, and how, from there, it trickles into these schools. First, I wish to explain how the first protagonist – the generator of “philosophy” - is what I call Industry, by which I refer to the world of production and marketing goods and services. Unless one wants to argue for the sake of “ceremony,” we all know that a lot of research in the world today is driven by Industry, both in the production process as well as in the marketing phases. Examples do not seem too necessary. What needs to be said perhaps is that, in all sectors, going by the advertisements in the public domain, Industry hires and pays “the cream” from our universities, and at times, when need be, Industry reaches out at the University for the best. But it is worthy underscoring that, contrary to what one tends to read or hear here and there in Kenya, a good proportion of the cream – the graduates - from our universities, unlike years gone by, works for that Industry that lies outside the university. This fact can be ascertained by looking at job advertisements in the newspapers. What this means is that there is preponderance of research from outside the university over that inside it and it becomes important to bear this in mind when those at the university address those without; there could be deeper thinking out there.

Then there are special interest groups other than Industry in which we include multilateral, bilateral or international organisations such as the United Nations and its bodies like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the World Trade Organization (WTO); the NGOs such as Oxfam and the ActionAid; Foundations

¹⁵ Willisms, W. E. *The English Essay*. Penguin Books, 1953.

like the Ford Foundation. Unlike Industry, these ones have proactively driven the direction of educational systems especially so in the Third World. Here again, I would use the expression used by Aristotle in his arguments “all are agreed that” or the expression of the travellers to Emmaus in the Bible “are you the only traveller from Jerusalem who doesn’t know ...” to support my claim, because the involvement of say, the World Bank in directing the education system in Kenya has often been in the news for all and sundry. In fact, all the bodies mentioned here with the exception of WTO have had a very predominant influence to the direction taken by the Kenyan education system especially after the introduction of the 8-4-4 system of education in 1986. UNDP’s promotion of reproductive health, gender equality and democracy has almost become its flagship. And so have Oxfam and ActionAid. Here we need to point out that these interest groups, besides employing “the cream” of our universities, they have often hired scholars from within those universities as “consultants” or have funded “projects” of their choice. Thus, nowhere is the generation of philosophy of education outside our universities’ schools of education, and the trickle being from outside towards these clearer than in the role of the special interest groups discussed in this section.

Now, here I would use the same argument that “all are agreed that “ both Industry and the interest groups already discussed here have a powerful ally in Media; Industry for its marketing and the special interest groups for the propagation of its agenda. The Media in turn incorporates the Entertainment world that becomes a formidable source of “philosophy” and of philosophy of education.

We should all agree that the Internet has become a formidable source of philosophy of education from which schools of education also benefit. I would claim that the Internet is the University *per excellence* for the twenty-first century.

How do all these agents generate “philosophy of education” or “education,” and how would they contribute human development in Africa or in the Third World or the World at large? Difficult as it may appear to create this link, I shall simply use a subtle connection as follows. “Education” is not synonymous with “schooling.” Obvious as it is, the point was again belaboured by the Deschoolers of the 1970s and so there is no value-addition developing this argument further except to state that schooling is a subset of education – let us use the mathematical language and call it “subset A.” Now, the other subset of education outside schooling – “Not A” – is what constitutes culture in the widest sense of the word. In developing, marketing and sometimes, propagating an idea or a good as “value” Industry and the special interest groups, the Media and the Internet generate culture and therefore, enhance or create “education” or a “a philosophy of education.”

As for whether they contribute to enhancing human development in Africa, Third

World or the World, the answer, in part, will be found in the intention or purpose of the agent concerned. As far as Industry is concerned, the purpose can be said to consist of profit for the shareholders, and therefore, any “good” generated, even in the name of “corporate social responsibility,” is purely accidental. In the case of the special interest groups discussed earlier, I will use two authorities to illustrate my point: Hancock, and Stiglitz, not so much because of their enormous experience but because of the factors they bring to bear.¹⁶ The first book speaks both about the multilateral organizations and the so-called Civil Societies while the second covers the case of the IMF and the World Bank. Hancock’s title summarises what these bodies are: they are “The Lords of Poverty!” Stiglitz, having been once The World Bank’s Chief Economist and President Clinton’s Economic Adviser, again, quite authoritatively dismisses any benign or magnanimous intention whatsoever in the working of these two bodies. And with that, I would conclude that, if any education, philosophy of education or human progress would ensue from these multilateral and civil society bodies, then, it would be accidental.

Let it be emphatically stated that the Media itself is first an Industry, and not the spokesman of the people as it is wrongly argued, and for obvious reasons and therefore, its primary motive is profit for its directors.

That is why, the Internet, if it is not driven too much by profit as is sometimes the case, can be the genuine principle of education, philosophy of education and of true human progress.

Necessity: principle of education and of progress.

Finally, it is time to suggest a possible way forward. I want to conclude paper by arguing that, it is not too important to worry if and how our universities contribute or not to human development of Africa; that development will come “necessarily.” Rather, without ascribing to the Hegelian “Transcendental Dialecticism” but rather, to the underlying law of history that Hegel tried to understand and which I call “the law of necessity,” this “law” will force our universities to yield that progress. By necessity or the law of necessity I refer to what Thomas Aquinas refers to as “The Divine Eternal Law” promulgated by the “*Ipsum Esse Subsistens*,” God.¹⁷ It is what some people call Nature, others, Cosmic Energy, while others call Fate.

This is not being fatalistic or blindly spiritual. Nor is it advocacy to do nothing about a situation. Rather it is a firm rational believe in the infinitely powerful human potentiality. I will give two examples to illustrate my point. No Educational Manpower Planning of some ministry of Education foresaw the

¹⁶ Hancock, G. (1989). *Lords of Poverty*. London: McMillan; Stiglitz, J. (2002). *Globalization and its Discontents*. New York: Penguin Books.

¹⁷ S. Th. I, Questions 103 – 119.

rising from slavery of such great Black American thinkers like Booker T. Washington. Du Bois, Martin Luther King, Oprah Winfrey; great sport persons such as Michael Jordan, Tiger Woods, The William Sisters; or a musician like Michael Jackson. No Ministry of Education planned the creation of a Bill Gates. And today, the world looks in awe at the rise of a certain Barack Obama from totally unplanned path of first growing “fatherless” and then “motherless,” and in being a Black. It is the same law that forced the world to have a certain John Paul II as pope from a totally unexpected country called Poland. In my opinion, he is perhaps the greatest thinker of our time, the greatest philosopher of our time and without doubt in my mind, the greatest educational philosopher of our time. It is the same law that gives the Kahlil Gibrans and Kiyosakis to the world, and the list can run into pages.

And what do our universities have to do? First, like it or not, the universities will be forced by the same law to take changes they may not be too willing to take right now. The very realisation of this Third CUEA Philosophical Conference is an impulsion of that law. In my own opinion, the surge of huge numbers to our universities is, to say the least, totally anachronistic, if that means, old fashioned! Our people are rushing to the university to celebrate the death of the university as we know it – to “necessarily” kill it -, because, no sooner will the majority of people have acquired degrees than they will realise the true “ceremonial” value of those degrees. By that time, the university of the twenty-first century, The Internet, the School-less, the truly Open University will have already taken root.

Human nature is not only controlled by that law of necessity but it is also part of that law. While the concept of human freedom is difficult to fathom, the best a human being can do is to align himself or herself with it, that is, to obey its dictates. That is what gives true self-actualisation. To act with intellectual, ethical and professional probity – it would have been enough to use the term “ethical” because it contains the other two qualities but for underscoring – is what the essence of that alignment is.

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ⁱ By “Continental” here I refer to the philosophical tradition other than the British Empiricism and the American Pragmatism.

ⁱⁱ Prof. Bennaars actually taught me during mid 1990s that was a recurrent theme in his lectures.