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Philosophy as a Veritable Tool for Peace-Building

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Abstract

In many parts of the world today, it is conflict, conflict and conflict. They include interracial, interregional, interreligious, international, intertribal, interstate, intercommunity, interfamily and interpersonal conflicts. The magnitude of some of these conflicts raises serious concerns about human existence in the globe. Besides, it is of common knowledge that there cannot be real socio-economic development in the midst of conflict. Now, in this situation, what contribution can a discipline like Philosophy boast of as having contributed to peace development in the world? What can the discipline, Philosophy, contribute to peace development in the world? This question is necessitated by the fact that Philosophy prides itself as a discipline which is predominantly concerned with trying to solve fundamental problems about human existence. Using the hermeneutic method, this paper introduced the discipline, Philosophy, presenting it as a veritable tool for the achievement of peace, the absence of which is inimical to human progress.

Introduction

This paper discussed extensively the need for peace in society and also the role which philosophy can play in the quest for peace in the society. However, before all that, there is

every reason for an in-depth and proper understanding of the concept of philosophy, including what it means as an academic discipline. Generally, the word 'Philosophy' means different things. Sometimes, it is used as a replacement for the word, 'rationale'. For instance, we may ask. What is the philosophy behind the American attack on Iraq? Which means: What is the rationale or justifying thinking behind the American attack on Iraq?

Again, the word, philosophy, is used to refer to the guide for action or guiding principle. In this sense, we sometimes hear somebody ask the question: What is your philosophy of life? In other words, what is the guiding principle of your life? To that, the reply may be: My philosophy of life is that what will be, will be (*quod sera, sera*). Sometimes too, we hear somebody say to a bereaved friend: 'Take it philosophically.' In other words, that the person in question should accept his or her loss with the mind of a philosopher, or as a philosopher would, that is, with mental quietude. The one who gives such an advice, knowingly or unknowingly, makes an allusion to the stoic philosophical view that pain or suffering is a natural condition of life, which must be accepted without qualms.

Coming to the world of philosophy itself, philosophers have no univocal definition of philosophy. Etymologically, the word, 'philosophy' derived from two Greek words – *philos* (loving) or *philein* (love of) and *sophia* (wisdom). Hence, etymologically, 'philosophy' means "the love of wisdom. (Udoidem 1992, p. 4) Besides the etymological definition, many other definitions have been advanced by philosophers. As already noted, there is no universally accepted definition of philosophy among philosophers. This, according to Randoll, is because

...in every definition turns out to be the expression of an individual and it is limited in conception reflecting only the practice of that enterprise in the definers own culture and shutting out as much as it includes. (Aghamelu 2005, p. 6)

In other words, every definition of philosophy usually reflects the intellectual background, ideology, cosmology, orientation or age (i.e. generation) of the philosopher in question. For instance, the ancient philosopher, Pythagoras defined philosophy as "the brainchild of wonder. (Aghamelu 2005, p. 6) Socrates, operating from the background of morality, defined philosophy as "a reflective self-examination of principles of the just and happy life. (Udoidem 1992, p. 3) Plato defined philosophy as "the science which is the science of itself and of the other sciences as well. (Plato, Republic, in Great Books, p. 8) He also defined it as "the acquisition of knowledge (Plato, Euthydemus, a475, p. 370). In another of his books called *Phaedo*, Plato also described philosophy as "the noblest and greatest of art" (Plato, *Phaedo*, p. 376). Finally, in his most famous book, *Republic*, Plato concluded that "philosophy has direct access to true reality" (Plato, Republic, in Great Books, p. 374) Hence, he described the philosopher as the man "whose heart is fixed on reality," (Omogbe J, 1990:1) that is, the man whose passion it is to seek the truth. (Omogbe J, 1990:1) Aristotle seems to agree with Plato because for him (Aristotle), philosophy is "a systematic search for truth". (Omogbe J, 1990:1) The hedonist philosopher, Epicurus defined philosophy as "an activity which secures the happy life by means of discussion and argument" (Omogbe 1990, p. 1) The French philosopher, Rene Descartes defined philosophy as "the mother of the sciences" (Aghamelu 2005, p. 6). David Hume referred to philosophy simply as "the moral science" (Aghamelu 2005, p. 7) For Immanuel Kant, philosophy is "the articulation of the spirit of the age" (Udoidem 1992, p. 3) Ludwig Wittgenstein defined philosophy as 'I know not what.' (Udoidem 1992, p. 3) He also defined it as a 'conceptual disease of which we should be cured' and states that philosophy 'aims at the logical clarification of thought' (Wehmeier, *Oxford Dictionary*).

We can go on and on to mention many other definitions of philosophy and we can still see that every definition is distinct from others because it naturally reflects the nature or nurture of the definer. For this reason, the etymological definition of philosophy as ‘the love of wisdom’ has remained the meeting point, and as such, the standard definition of philosophy. However, some of these individual definitions enjoy a wider range of acceptability than others.

As an academic discipline, philosophy has five major branches, which are: Metaphysics, Epistemology, Ethics, Logic and Aesthetics. Metaphysics is the branch which studies the nature of being, that is, the nature of reality as a whole, including issues about God, man and the universe. Etymologically, the word “Metaphysics” was derived from two Greek words- *meta*, meaning after or beyond and *physica*, meaning physics or nature. Metaphysics, therefore, means “After Physics”. The word *Metaphysics* is believed to have originated from Andronicus, the editor of Aristotle’s works who, after arranging Aristotle’s works on physics, did not know what to call the other ones that followed. He then decided to refer to them simply as Metaphysics, that is, after physics. Later Metaphysics came to be seen as the discipline which studies being. What is the essence of being? What are the essences of things? What is responsible for the being of things? In other words, what is the origin or source of the existence of being? Why do things exist? Why is there something, instead of nothing? Who is man? What is the purpose of life, if there is? Does the soul exist? If it does, what is its origin? Is there an interaction between the body and the soul? Where is the location of the soul in the body?

Epistemology is the branch of philosophy which deals with the nature, the sources, the means, the limit, the extent and the validity of human knowledge. The word, epistemology was derived from two Greek words - *episteme*, which means knowledge and *logos* meaning theory or study. Hence, etymologically, *epistemology* means knowledge theory; or better put, theory of knowledge. It raises such questions as: What does it really mean to know? How do we know that we know what we claim to know? When we say we know this or that, what do we mean? In other words, what constitutes knowledge? That is, what is the nature of human knowledge? What is the difference between knowledge and belief? Can we know something without believing it? Can we believe something without knowing it?

Ethics is the branch of philosophy which deals with the morality of human conduct. It is also known as Moral Philosophy. The word *ethics* was actually gotten from the Greek word *ethos*, which means character or way of life. Technically, ethics refers to the study of the principles of human action. The first great moral philosopher in Western philosophy was Socrates. With Socrates, ethics became an important part of Western Philosophy. The central question of ethics is ‘How does man live a moral life? Put differently, ‘What should be the moral standard? The main ethical theories in the history of Western philosophy are different answers to this central question of ethics. Some other questions of ethics are: What is good? Is there anything that is intrinsically good or bad? Are there circumstances under which it is proper to tell lies? Is abortion wrong? Can we ‘help’ a patient who is in serious pain by taking away his life? In other words, is euthanasia justifiable?

Logic is the branch of philosophy which deals with rules or principles used to distinguish correct reasoning from incorrect reasoning and correct arguments from incorrect arguments. Hence, logic is, sometimes, said to be the science of arguments. The word ‘logic’ was derived from the Greek word - *logos*, which can be translated variously as reason, justification or rationale. The implication here is that logic is synonymous with rationality. Hence, to operate without logic is to operate irrationally. Since all men are rational, it implies that all men are

imbued with some logic and they practice logic – knowingly or unknowingly. For example, logic is applied in soup-cooking. As an old woman puts her pot on her lit stove or cooker, and pours some water into it; she determines what next to put into the pot and what should follow after what interval. This is a case of the application of natural logic. However, logic, as a branch of philosophy is a special thing. It is academic or scientific logic. It is not the kind of logic common to all men. It is the kind of logic seen as the science of thought. In other words, academic logic is interested in reasoning. There are two major kinds of arguments or reasoning – inductive and deductive.

Aesthetics is the branch of philosophy which deals with the assessment of beauty and works of Arts. Etymologically, the word, *aesthetics* was derived from the Greek word, *aesthet-ikos*, which means perception. As an academic discipline, Aesthetics studies what immediately appeals to our visual and auditory powers of perception. By the way, there are three main types of beauty – intellectual beauty, moral beauty and physical beauty. It is pertinent to point out here that aesthetics is concerned with physical beauty. It raises and tries to address such issues as: What is the nature of Art? What is the purpose of Art? How does one recognize a good work of Art? In other words, what makes a work of Art good or bad? What is the nature of beauty? Are there objective standards of beauty or is it a subjective phenomenon? Where does the essence of beauty lie? Does it reside in the thing or person said to be beautiful, or is it in the ‘eye of the beholder,’ or does it exist somewhere outside of both, as held by Plato.

Besides the major areas of philosophy, there are applied areas which include philosophy of language, philosophy of law or jurisprudence, philosophy of history, philosophy of mind or psychology, philosophy of mathematics, philosophy of religion, philosophy of sports and the philosophy of culture.

The Need for Peace in the Society

The need for peace in the society cannot be over emphasized. The importance of peace to man is underscored by the fact that the United Nations set aside a particular day for the annual celebration of peace the world over. The 21st of September is the world peace day.

Peace in an individual is synonymous with mental quietude or psychological balance. This is the kind of peace which the *Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defined as ‘the state of being calm or quiet’. The absence of peace in a person can reduce the one to the level of brutes or lower animals. Hence it is said that violence of any kind is an act of poverty of the mind rather than that of material things.

At the societal level, peace is a prerequisite for the achievement of development and productivity and by extension, societal progress. There cannot be progress in the absence of peace. This is the kind of peace which the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defined as ‘a situation or a period of time in which there is no war or violence in a country or an area’. Wherever there is no peace, chaos becomes the order of the day. The picture of the condition of people in a society devoid of peace seems best captured in Thomas Hobbes’ account of the state of nature, among the accounts of other socio-political philosophers. The theory of the state of nature refers to the speculation about the natural condition of society prior to any form of social contract which ushered in civil government. It is man’s crude state before the influence of any form of civilization.

In Thomas Hobbes’ account of the state of nature, man was unlimitedly free, being that there was no authority, morality, law, sense of justice or any form of standards. In other words, all men had equal rights to all things or everything. Nothing belonged to anybody as personal property. As such, if a man liked anything, he simply went for it. Even if the thing in question

was in somebody else's custody, it did not mean that it belonged to the person in whose hands it was. Having a thing or holding a thing did not mean owning it. It simply meant that the one had been able to retain it hitherto and till then. This implies that the entire idea of what is good or bad depended on the desire of individuals, and the strength to obtain and retain what is desired. Describing the state of nature, Hobbes stated:

But whatever is the object of any man's appetite or desire, that is it which he for his part calleth 'good' and the object of his hate and aversion, 'evil',...For these words of 'good', 'evil' and 'contemptible' are ever used with relation to the person that useth them: there being nothing simply and absolutely so, nor any common rule of 'good' and 'evil' to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves; but from the person of the man, where there is commonwealth; or in a commonwealth, from the person that represented it... (Hobbes, *Leviathan* 1983, p. 227).

Therefore the man who wanted anything that was already in someone else's hands simply had to fight and try to claim it from he who had it. If he succeeded in snatching it from him, he retained it until such a time when a stronger person defeated him and wrestled the thing from him:

If any two desire the same thing which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies; and in the way to their end (which is principally their own conservation, and sometimes their Delectation only), endeavour to destroy, or subdue one another (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 1983, p. 184).

Thus, the guiding principle in the state of nature was the *Trasymachian* principle that justice is the interest of the stronger, which implies that might is right. (Enteaves, 1970, p.1) So there was constant tension and no permanent ownership of anything. All these culminated in a situation of perpetual war – a war of every man against every other man. This perpetual war was not necessarily characterized by physical combat alone; it included tension, born of uncertainty. According to Hobbes, war does not necessarily consist in the absence of peace, but also in any situation in which there is the fear of imminent danger. Hobbes submitted that in the state of nature, there was

... no knowledge of the face of the earth, no account of time, no arts, no letters, no society; and, which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man was solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short (Hobbes, *Leviathan* 1983, p. 186).

In his social contract theory, Hobbes argues that it was for this reason that all men opted out of that state by agreeing to form a government (in Hobbes' language, commonwealth), in which all would submit all their rights to a leader or 'sovereign' who would act as an arbiter in the reconciliation of rights and dispensation of justice. So the best option in Hobbes' words was for all men to:

...confer all their power and strength upon one man, or upon one assembly of men, that may reduce all their wills by plurality of voices, unto one will: which is as much as to say, to appoint one man, or assembly of men, to bear their person; and every one to own and acknowledge himself to be author of whatsoever he that so beareth their person shall act, or cause to be acted, in those things which concern the common peace and safetie; and therein to submit their wills, everyone to his will, and their judgements to his judgement (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 1983, p. 227)

From the foregoing, it is imperative that all hands should be on deck to achieve peace at all times. The natural result of the absence of peace is violence or chaos because Hobbes once said: 'In war, force and fraud are the two cardinal virtues'. Peace is priceless. There is no sacrifice too much to make for the sake of peace. It is only through peace that progress can be achieved and not through war. Chief Odumegwu Ojukwu once noted that no war in history has ever solved the problem it set out to solve. Therefore peace should be sought with vigour. It was in appreciation of its importance that, as already noted above, the United Nations declared the 21st of September World Peace Day. Credence was given to the crusade for peace when in July 2015, Pope Francis embarked on a papal visit to three Latin American countries- Paraguay, Bolivia and Ecuador. The Pope said that the essence of his visit was to 'encourage peace'. In line with this ideology, a Chinese warrior cum philosopher, Sun Tzu, in his classical book on strategy, titled *The Art of War*, noted: 'To win without fighting is best'. In a similar thought pattern, Mahatma Gandhi once said: 'Non-violence is the first article of my faith, it is also the last article of my creed'. The Lord Jesus Christ, in his divine wisdom, knew that the best thing to give to his followers was peace, hence his promise: 'I leave you peace, my peace I give you....' The book of Isaiah, chapter 66, verse 12, says: "For thus saith the Lord, 'Behold I will extend peace to her like a river and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowering stream'".

The Role of Philosophy in Peace-Building

From the various definitions of Philosophy and the branches of Philosophy as presented above, it can be seen that Philosophy is a discipline which not only equips a person with high intellectual ability but also has the capability to enrich his moral capacity. With a good training in Metaphysics, Ethics, Epistemology, Aesthetics and logic; people are well-groomed with the necessary ingredients to receive peace as individuals and to adopt a peaceful disposition in appropriating issues. For example, a good training in metaphysics, especially stoic metaphysics, exposes one to the teaching that pain, provocation and all sorts of suffering are necessary conditions in life. This makes one appreciate such conditions when they present themselves and helps one maintain his peace always. It is like being fore-armed because you were fore-warned. Metaphysics helps one to appreciate the reality of peace. Ethics helps an individual to appreciate the morality of peace. Aesthetics helps one to appreciate the beauty of peace. Logic helps one to appreciate the rationale of peace. In this way, philosophy can be used to produce individuals who are, so to say, embodiments of peace. These philosophers not only exude peace and as such influence many others in the society with the spirit of peace; they also help to maintain peace whenever the opportunity presents itself. This is one way in which philosophy helps in peace-building in the society. Philosophers have helped to build peace in the society in different ways through writing, preaching, seminars, workshops, oral conversations, folklores, etc. The Socratic maxim that 'the un-examined life is not worth living' has been a reference point in moral discourse. St Anselm's medieval maxim, *credo ut intelligam* (I believe in order that I may understand) has been a great encouragement for belief in God. The arguments for God's existence and various other moral and socio-political teachings of philosophers have played direct and indirect roles to contribute to social peace and stability.

Moreover, there are many philosophical sayings which help to direct society towards the line of peace instead of the line of violence. Some have already been mentioned in this work. We can add a few more of such philosophical quotes:

- 'A peacemaker always fairs better than an agitator'

- ‘The beauty of life depends not on how happy you are but on how happy others can be because of you’
- ‘Peace is reciprocal’
- ‘The way you treat people is the way they react to you’

Conclusion

From all indications, philosophy has a great role and actually has played a great role in peace-building. In his postulation of *the ideal state*, Plato maintains that there can be no peace in society until philosophers become leaders or leaders become philosophers:

Until philosophers are kings, or the kings and princes of this world have the spirit and power of philosophy, and political greatness and wisdom meet in one...then only will this our state have a possibility of life and behold the light of day (Popkin et al. 1973, p.178)

No wonder the Catholic Church, in its wisdom, made it mandatory for her priests to study philosophy, a line which is today being towed by some other Christian denominations and some other religions. The idea is not only to build these priests into high capacity intellectuals but also to make them ready and willing agents of peace-building. No wonder also that the Nigerian Government via the National Universities Commission (NUC) modified the curriculum of tertiary institutions and made it such that philosophy is now one of the General Studies Subjects (GSS) of Universities.

By and large, it would not be an overstatement to say that philosophy has what it takes to play a pivotal role in the advancement of the frontiers of peace and knowledge. Anyway, this is not surprising as philosophy is regarded as the mother of all disciplines for which reason the highest academic degree is the PhD which stands for ‘Philosophy Doctor’, put right, ‘Doctor of Philosophy’. Hence, we have PhD in Philosophy, PhD in Law, PhD in English, PhD in Mathematics, PhD in Biology, etc.

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