

PHILOSOPHY IN CONTEMPORARY TIME: RELEVANCE VS. PUBLIC PERCEPTION

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Abstract

What is the relevance of philosophy in this contemporary time? Philosophy is viewed by many people as an irrelevant discipline- one of no social and/or practical significance. It is sometimes seen also as an abstract and drab enterprise fit only for the intellectuals. Overtime also, philosophy has come to be perceived as having enjoyed its relevance in the past and no longer has any relevance in this era of “science and technology”. However, certain questions arise: Given this perception, is philosophy actually of any relevance to the contemporary society? In practical terms, what are the roles of philosophy to society? Using the traditional philosophical method of analysis and exposition, this paper finds that philosophy plays and continues to play a vital role in contemporary society. The paper submits that philosophy is essential for an all-encompassing human development. As philosophy trains the human mind to reason correctly and rationally, the paper recommends a little bit of philosophy for all in the different levels of the educational sector. This proper training of the human mind with the tool of philosophy translates to human cum societal enhancement.

Keywords: Philosophy, Contemporary, Reason, Public Perception, Societal Development

Introduction

Philosophy, as an area of study is nowadays attracting a lot of lack of patronage for the singular reason that it does not put “food on the table nor does it build bridges”. This is a manner of describing the common place opinion that philosophy is an abstract “speculative reasoning or exercise about cosmos or reality and thus has no direct relevance or contribution to make in practical issues of human existence”¹. For such people, philosophy has nothing to do with the real world. It is seen as mere speculations that have no practical significance. Some go further to say that philosophy is a study in futility. Others are of the opinion that the study of philosophy, especially in our tertiary institutions has no significant value. Oftentimes, people think that 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. Some people have rejected philosophy on the ground that it plays no important role to human life and the development of human society. On several occasions, young students of philosophy and other non-students of philosophy have posed some questions to us and some of our teachers: What is the value of philosophy? What role does philosophy play in our contemporary world? Why must I study philosophy? What do I stand to gain by studying philosophy? Can philosophy actually put food on my table? Ayn Rand captures this worry among students when she held that:

Most people, if asked to list the subjects that are of most practical significance to human life, might name medicine, computer science, engineering, physics, or even political science. But few would name philosophy, which is regarded as an esoteric subject, good for little more than debating unanswerable questions on college campuses or in coffee shops. When it comes to living one’s life in the real

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world and dealing with real issues, it is commonly thought, philosophy is irrelevant².

Is this view true? Has philosophy really any function or relevance in terms of contributing to the practical existence of the contemporary society or to society in general? To hold a position in the negative as regards to this question, is to affirm the poverty and irrelevance of philosophy.

The fulcrum of this paper is to examine the issue of the unwarranted underestimation of philosophy as a course of study and as an area of human endeavour. The bottom line of our argument is that while the import of philosophy might not be glaringly in the immediate as Architecture, Medicine, Mining etc, its contribution is immense and undeniable. It is also a finding of this work that the “tag of irrelevance” on philosophy is as a result of misconceptions in most conceptions or understanding of philosophy. A more complete answer to the question of the relevance of philosophy requires a reconstruction of the concept of philosophy itself. Philosophy is not an activity performed exclusively by university professors who work in departments of philosophy. Such a definition excludes, for example, Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, Hume and a good number of scholars that never taught in any university. The work also sets out to portray in a different light, philosophy from the abstract nature which it has been perceived and of which Thales in his star gazing, did not redeem.

The work begins with an attempt to establish “what philosophy is not” by correcting some of the wrong notions of philosophy. Further, it attempts to posit more all-encompassing and reliable notions of philosophy, while it ultimately enumerates the relevance of philosophy through the many manifestations of philosophy.

Defining Philosophy

From a common place point of view, when one hears of “philosophy”, “what immediately comes to mind is the picture of arguments, disagreements or logic”³. Some other people see philosophy as a subject that deals with matters out of this world, in the realm of the spiritual. Others see it as an academic activity fit only for the ivory towers and of no practical import to existence. Others still see philosophy merely as a “people’s worldview or one’s moral guide”⁴.

However, even though philosophy cannot deny encompassing all of these ascriptions, it is however wider and far reaching than such limited understanding.

To attempt to define philosophy, we must first of all at this juncture attempt to establish that which is not philosophy, and it is at the end also philosophizing.

What Philosophy is Not

To many, philosophy implies such things as “dexterity in telling lies” or “deceiving the unwary”. To those who hold this position, the philosopher is that man who possesses an extraordinary power to turn issues and arguments upside down all to his favour. These people recognize the complex intellectual activity involved in the trade of philosophy but simply have a wrong conception of the essence of the “philosophical activity”. However, philosophy is not the “art or science of lies telling”. Philosophy is definitely not the art of deception. As a matter of fact truth telling is the fulcrum of the philosophical enterprise. Philosophy attempts to conceive the true nature of reality, and cannot at the same time be involved in the falsification of the same

reality which it purports to portray in its true light. This explains Mann and Weyche's claim that the philosopher is one "who loves the truth in its deepest meaning"⁵.

An art which is closely related to philosophy and which people have continually mistaken as philosophy is sophistry. Sophistry is the use of powerful and sometimes fallacious arguments to distort the bane of issues. This was the stock in trade of the Greek thinker Gorgias and a good number of other sophists (itinerant teachers). Many people mistake philosophy for this art. However, while sophistry attempts to share some features with philosophy, philosophy is not sophistry. While philosophy is an activity with a nobler aim than sophistry, which is an unattached attempt to unravel reality in its many mysteries. Sophistry on the other hand is an art in which its practitioners are basically interested in the financial proceeds they make in teaching their students "oratory" in order to acquire political power or office.

Again, another wrong notion of philosophy is that which arises from people's conclusion about the concern of the philosopher. For many people, philosophy is some remote or anti-worldly activity and to this uninitiated, the idea of the "philosopher" conjures images of dead white guys with unattended to beards and furrowed brows, incessantly nulling over the meaning of life. For them still, the philosophers are spirits or conservative lots who have taken to live against the world. The philosopher "may well be an ascetic or hermit or should just be these"⁶. This opinion is however erroneous and should be discarded for "although many people think philosophy as being remote from normal interests and beyond comprehension, nearly all of us have some philosophical views, whether we are aware of them or not"⁷. Anyone who asks questions about concepts, seeks clarifications and distinctions, and opens up new conceptual space and gives some argumentation to support his or her claims thereby engages in philosophy. The implication of this, is that most professionals in their different fields practice a certain level of philosophy one way or another.

In a more loosed sense of the term, every human being is a philosopher. Almost everyone has been puzzled from time to time by such basic philosophic questions as: "What is the meaning of life?", "Did I have any existence before I was born into this world?" and "Is there life after death?" Umeogu also captures this in a sense when he explains that:

Most people also have some kind of philosophy in the sense of a personal worldview or outlook on life. Even a person who claims that considering philosophic questions is a waste of time is expressing what is significant, worthwhile or valuable to philosophy. A rejection of all philosophy is in itself philosophy. So if we are going to philosophize, we shall philosophize. Even, when we say that we are not going to philosophize, we must philosophize; for we need philosophy to prove that we are not going to philosophize. So, at any rate, we philosophize⁸.

In essence, in a general sense, when we are philosophizing we are philosophizing and when we are not philosophizing or claim that we are not philosophizing or that philosophy or philosophizing has no relevance to practical experience, we are philosophizing, as we would require some level of conviction or convincing one way or another to establish that we are philosophizing or not philosophizing.

At any rate, the above general meaning of philosophy, is however, not the case in the technical sense of the term. It is this technical sense of the term that is at this point of utmost import to us as it establishes clearly that which qualifies to be philosophy. In delimiting what

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qualifies as philosophy in the technical sense, we must establish qualities that are all embracing and far reaching than the notions that have been found wanting.

What is Philosophy?

So what exactly is philosophy?

There are a number of different answers to this question in large part because the word itself is used in different ways by different people. For those who are uninitiated in philosophy, philosophy is portrayed as an image of old white beard men nulling over reality or is it essences?, “the meaning of which they know not”. Often than not, we speak of the “philosophies” of different people, organizations or institutions- the philosophy of the ruling All Progressives Congress or the philosophy of UNIZIK. But philosophy as a discipline in academia is much more different from this descriptions. Philosophy can be thought of as the inquiry into what David Curry calls “the furniture of the world”⁹. What is out there? How do we know or justify our knowledge of the world, and how do our beliefs about different things relate to one another? Are they consistent? Do we have good reasons for what we believe and what are these? These fundamental questions are the types exclusively reserved for philosophy.

Etymologically, the word “philosophy” is derived from two Greek words, *philein* which means ‘to love’ and *Sophia* which means ‘wisdom’. Philosophy from its etymology simply means “love of wisdom”. It was Pythagoras who first coined the word philosophy when he called himself a lover of wisdom. When people called him the wise one, he refused to answer the name and told them that he was not a wise one. For him, he had not attained wisdom, rather he loved wisdom; he sought for wisdom. This is why a philosopher can be said to be a lover of wisdom or a seeker of wisdom. Philosophy is therefore seen as an inquiry. It does not claim to know everything but it makes critical and objective effort to acquire wisdom. A philosopher is not a person with “‘I-too-know’ mentality; he is the one who knows that he does not know and makes effort to know”¹⁰.

This Greek conception of philosophy as the “love of wisdom” is still valid today. Philosophy now, as then, begins with the realization that we know very little about the most important things in life. Philosophers continue to ponder basic questions about the universe and human existence. They are away of the answers provided by common sense and authority (religious or secular), “but know that such answers can be partially or entirely mistaken”¹¹. Philosophers are “skeptical” in the root sense of “taking a closer look” at an idea before accepting it. They seek answers based on reason and experience, realizing that any answer so proposed (including theirs’) is only tentative and subject to debate (this will be discussed in more detail in the subtheme on the social relevance of philosophy). As a matter of fact, practically every major philosophical question or problem is still vigorously disputed, even after centuries of debate. The “lack of definitive answers in philosophy may seem frustrating until we come to see that the value of philosophizing lies not so much in the theories it produces as in the very activity of seeking wisdom.

Garforth saw the difficulty in this simple explanation of the “complexity” called philosophy. This is why he explains thus:

The Greek word *philosophia*, said to have been invented by Pythagoras, means ‘love of wisdom’, but ‘wisdom’ is a word hedged around with ambiguities. It can mean ‘knowledge’, ‘experience of life’, ‘a discriminating sense of value’; or all three together, but what knowledge is and whether some forms of it (if so, which)

are preferable to others, what sort of experience qualifies as wisdom, all this is left obscure and provides material for unending controversy¹².

The above gives one a foretaste of what one should expect when one dabbles in philosophical matters. This controversy inherent in its meaning manifests also in its nature, scope and purpose¹³.

This lack of a generally accepted definition of philosophy is more or less attributable to the nature of its subject matter which is reality as a whole- the entirety of being (the universe). As it is, no one can have a comprehensive knowledge of “all that is”: we can only have knowledge of some aspects as they manifest to us. Odey narrated the storey of the five blind men and the elephant to illustrate this point. Asking the blind men to touch the elephant and to describe what they observe, Odey writes thus:

The first person touched its side and said it was like a wall; the second, its ears and said it was like fan; the third, its tail and said it was like a rope; the fourth, its leg and said it was like a tree; and the fifth, its tusk and said that it was like a horn. They are all right and wrong. Right, in the sense that a part identified by each person is a true description of an elephant. Wrong, in the sense that, none of the parts so described by each person, gives a complete picture of an elephant. To have a true and complete picture of an elephant calls for a synthesis of the various descriptions of its parts¹⁴.

Beyond the etymological definition or description of philosophy, there are almost as many definitions of philosophy as there are philosophers and philosophy texts books. Scholars who have attempted a definition of philosophy have all done so from their different ideological orientations and background. Socrates the ancient Greek philosopher and moralist for instance see philosophy “as a rational study of the moral life. This justifies the often quoted Socratic dictum: an unexamined life is not worth living”¹⁵. For Plato, the philosopher is “the man who is ready to taste every form of knowledge, is glad to learn and never satisfied...whose passion is to see the truth...whose heart is fixed on Reality itself”¹⁶. Aristotle on his own part, see philosophy as “the quest for the principles and causes of things”¹⁷. For Epicurus, philosophy is an activity which seeks to secure the happiness of man by means of discussion and argument. According to Ludwig Wittgenstein, philosophy deals with clarification and language analysis. For the American pragmatic philosopher philosophy is the “criticism of criticisms” which is different from any other mode of criticism. He sees philosophy as “thinking which has become conscious of itself”¹⁸. For A.J. Ayer philosophy is in its entirety a critical enterprise. According to Bertrand Russell, Philosophy is merely an attempt to answer ultimate questions not carelessly and dogmatically as we do in ordinary life and even in the sciences, but critically, after exploring all that makes such questions puzzling and after realizing all the vagueness and confusion that underline our ordinary ideas”¹⁹. For Thomson, philosophy is “a way of thinking rather than as an academic institution. Put simply, it is critical thought about concepts and ways of thinking. It is thought that involves the analysis or clarification of concepts and the uncovering of meanings, and which is normally supported by arguments”²⁰. For Audi and Scheler, philosophy is defined as:

A reasoned pursuit of fundamental truths, a quest for understanding... it seeks to establish standards of evidence, to provide rational methods for solving conflicts and to create techniques for evaluating arguments... it enhances one’s ability to

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perceive the relationships among the various fields of study; and it deepens one's sense of the meaning and varieties of human experience²¹.

Kwasi Wiredu, the Ghanain Philosopher conceives philosophy as dealing with the intellectual foundations of our life, interrogating and evaluating profoundly, the foundations of our beliefs and actions. According to J. Omoregbe, "philosophy is a reflective activity on human experience in search of answers to some fundamental questions."²² Also for B. Umeugo, philosophy is defined as: "Life itself: life as it is lived. It is not an abstract term, even when it sounds abstract. It is a discipline that cuts across color, race, culture and national and international frontiers. In short, it is the mother of all disciplines as far as life is concerned".²³ Uduma thinks that "philosophy, distinctively and exclusively, deals with ultimates, ultimate things either about the universe as a whole or about matters affecting human fate and conduct in the most basic way."²⁴ C.E.M. Joad underscores the all-inclusive nature of the subject matter of philosophy when he holds that: "there is nothing at all outside the scope of philosophy. Every other branch of human enquiry limits its scope".²⁵ Also, this versatility of the scope of philosophy is why T. Oizermann thinks that attempts at defining philosophy is a clear distortion of its subject matter. Accordingly, he says that: "Every definition is a limitation of the content of a subject and therefore, is itself limited".²⁶ In other words, philosophy is all encompassing and does not require a definition.

These many definitions points to the fact of the complexity of philosophy. Reality being the subject matter of philosophy is immense, diverse and complex in its manifestations. Who attempts understanding it, can only acquaint him or herself with some of its aspects. The aspect of interest to the observer, will definitely influence his perception of philosophy and as a matter of fact reality. Wittgenstein for instance, sees philosophy as an intellectual activity, which focuses on analysis of language to achieve clarity of thought. Philosophy is "a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language".²⁷ For this singular reason, he thinks that philosophy at all times should aim at "the logical clarification of thought".

At any rate, we must assert that, although this complexity in trying to define philosophy exists, philosophy however, has certain basic characteristics, which every definition of it must have in order to be seen as a substantive attempt. These basic characteristics are: comprehensiveness, criticism and non-supposition. Any definition of philosophy which would be considered would include these features or be seen to be inadequate.

Nature of Philosophy

We must state at this point that any discussion on the nature of philosophy is bound to be problematic. This is based on the backdrop of the varied views of philosophers concerning the nature of philosophy. One important thing to note like we mentioned earlier, is that a philosopher's notion of philosophy is highly dependent on the philosophical camp that the particular philosopher belongs to. In this sense, there is no generally accepted view among philosophers concerning the nature of philosophy. This notwithstanding, there is one essential element that cuts across the views of varied camps of philosophers: Philosophy is essentially a rational activity. So what characterizes the nature of philosophy is rationality. In this sense, we can say that every human person that possesses rationality is a philosopher. So for the fact that one is a rational being is enough for one to be called a philosopher. We can say without mincing words that philosophy is a prerogative of human beings.

The concept, philosophy, is understood both as a First Order activity and also as a Second Order activity. As a First Order activity philosophy is seen as the property of all rational beings. This is what is also known as the loose sense of philosophy. In this sense philosophy is seen as a worldview or a principle that guides people's life. It is a way through which individuals or group of individuals try to make sense out of human experience. This is why somebody can say: "My philosophy is this or that." Like when the Trojan Military General Hector would tell his army "what we do in life echoes in eternity" or the UNIZIK motto which reads: "Discipline, Self-Reliance and Excellence". These are the driving force of these bodies and therefore their philosophy. But this is only philosophy at the loose or generic sense.

Beyond this, philosophy is more of the development of a skill than the acquisition of a body of knowledge, in that it evaluates arguments and assesses presuppositions and truth claims. The components of philosophy are the building blocks of our different "world-views", or belief systems, our cultures; the foundational concepts with which people view the world, our interpretation of the world around us and how we understand the relatedness of nature's particulars to one another.

These portray philosophy as a Second Order activity. As a Second Order activity, philosophy is seen as the activity of professionals. Here philosophy is seen as an organized activity. This is what is referred to as academic philosophy. This type of philosophy is an organized study pursued in universities and other tertiary institutions of learning as something more serious, organized and purposeful. Philosophy as a Second Order activity is what we mean by philosophy *qua tale*, that is, philosophy in the true sense of the word; philosophy in the strict sense. The understanding of the nature of philosophy is captured by C.B. Okolo when he writes that:

Philosophy in its academic or professional meaning is a critical enterprise, something dynamic, a quest, a search, indeed; one would even define it as a spirit of evaluative exploration or inquiry into all areas of human experience, of the world in which we live, man himself and his place in the universe ... In its widest range, so to speak, philosophy tries to give a coherent and systematic account of the multifaceted universe of being and knowledge; of what is and how man knows. In short, philosophy carries out a critique of daily experience in quest of truth of all experience as is rationally possible for man²⁸.

However, one must just recognize that philosophy is simply borne out of curiosity, wonder, puzzle, bewilderment and amazement; it is borne out of the desire to know and understand. This fact Umeogu profoundly captures when he posits that:

The reality is that rich or poor, black or white, master or servant, developed or under-developed, we all philosophize whether it is conscious or not. Philosophizing in this context means to inquire, to probe, to question, to understand, to explain, and the capability to give answers or clarify issues that border on understanding and compartmentalizing events and happenings within specific cultural setting.²⁹

In essence, to philosophize, there must be that innate desire to probe; to embark on a rationalizing quest. As a matter of fact, in the absence of a passion to wonder, there is no philosophy as far philosophy is concerned. The implication of this, is that whoever dares to "wonder" is a philosopher. The point of difference lies in the manner, degree and the possible

outcome of the philosophical voyage. Having seen the nature of the subject of philosophy, it is only pertinent to turn to its branches for emphasis sake.

Branches of Philosophy

Philosophy is concerned with every area of human knowledge, and it is precisely based on this backdrop of the wide application of its techniques of understanding to different subject areas that it is such a useful area of study. There are five broad branches of philosophy. They are: metaphysics, ethics, logic, epistemology and aesthetics. **Metaphysics** investigates the rational principles, foundations and structures of the Cosmos or Being (Reality). It asks such questions as: what are the fundamental principles that govern the universe?, what is Being or Reality?; **Ethics** is basically concerned with formulating rules of conduct and examining the justifications for such rules. It is in simpler terms, the “science” of the rightness and wrongness of human action. It asks such questions as: what makes an action or a thing good or bad? etc; **Logic** deals with the canons of valid reasoning. It investigates the formal relationship between reasons and conclusions and the structure of rational thought; **Epistemology**, which is the theory of knowledge or Cristeriology, looks at the nature and foundations of knowledge. It seeks to delineate what we can know, how we can know, and the extent we can know; **Aesthetics** is the value science of beauty or the appreciation of the arts. It seeks to understand the bases for our claims to beauty or ugliness. Is beauty in the eye of the beholder?, or is there an objective criteria of beauty?.

Apart from the above five traditional branches of philosophy, there is also what has come to be called the “specialized areas” of philosophy where philosophy performs its conceptual and analytic functions in particular ways. These areas are: philosophy of politics (political philosophy), philosophy of science, philosophy of language, philosophy of law, philosophy of religion, philosophy of mind (philosophical psychology), philosophy of education etc. As a matter of fact philosophy cuts across every area of human endeavour. However, inasmuch as these diverse areas of philosophy attend to different areas of being and human experience, they do not entirely exclude each other. A philosopher in attempting to resolve socio-political issues sees himself projecting towards the ethical or metaphysical planes in search of answers. This is not restricted to political questions, but cuts across all the branches and areas of philosophy, giving credence to the idea of the unity of Being.

Methods in Philosophy

There are several methods or modes with which philosophers approach their attempt at decoding or understanding reality. We have the analytical, critical, reflective, contemplative, hermeneutical, dialectical, dialogical modes or methods, among others in philosophy.

When a philosopher emphasizes any of these methods, his thought or philosophy is described accordingly. For example, the analytic philosophers are so-called because their works or interpretations of reality are through the rigours of analysis of concepts and experiences. Hegel for example is called a “dialectician” because of the three stages of thesis, antithesis and synthesis involved in his explanation of human social and historical evolution.

At any rate, it must be noted that there are no stereotypes between these various methods of philosophy. What this means is that philosophers in practice whether consciously or unconsciously combine these methods in their search for the foundations of “things”.

Functional Values of Philosophy to Society

Although it has been established from our preceding discussions that philosophers do not have a consensus in terms of a generally accepted meaning or definition of philosophy, they however, do not dispute about the value or relevance of philosophy in daily affairs of men. That is to say that, “there is a recognizable consensus among many philosophers that philosophy performs a critical and social function in society”³⁰. This is particularly so, when viewed against the backdrop that philosophy is essentially a rational, unattached and systematical inquiry into the whole spectrum of human experience; thought and conduct. Philosophy has the undeniable capacity for instilling critical thought, creativity and renewal of ideas. The pivotal role that philosophical thought has played throughout the centuries past and continues to play spanning all cultures of the world testifies to its significance. As a conceptual response to man’s existential problems, philosophy cannot be underestimated. Any society, who does so, does so at its own peril.

i. Critical/Interpretative Role

The critical approach to issues, which philosophy creates in man, conditions him with a rich capacity for reflection and deliberation and the right sense of value and the right attitude to issues. Aligning with this position, David Hume posits that the philosopher is particularly useful to society. This is why is said that, “though a philosopher may live remote from business, the genius of philosophy if cultivated by several must gradually diffuse itself throughout the whole society.”³¹ It follows that if everyone imbibes the critical spirit which philosophy provides, society will be better for it. John Dewey who described philosophy as the “criticism of criticisms”, construes it basically as a social method; a system for dealing with the social and moral problems that bedevils man in society. Karl Marx discards the interpretative function of philosophy, but instead acknowledges that philosophy is a weapon for social reconstruction. For Socrates as for Plato, philosophy has practical value to the extent that it is not just an abstract vocation, but a way of concrete social re-engineering. The relevance of philosophy is not missing in their thought, hence the maxim that “only when philosophers become kings or the kings imbibe the philosophical attitude will society be fully liberated”. This explains why they devoted a greater part of their lives inculcating these principles in the daily lives of man and society. This explains the position that all of Modern political philosophy are footnotes on Plato. F.C. Okafor does not also doubt the profound relevance of philosophy when he explains that:

Today, philosophy has still a vital role to play in human condition and human enterprise. This is because it provides comprehensive interpretation of fundamental issues and the events pertinent to them. It probes into the various forms of meaningful language, the shades and differentiations in human communication as well as the analysis and synthesis thereof. Hence it attempts to ensure clarity and understanding in human dialogue and assumptions. It seeks to satisfy man’s curiosity regarding life, existence, the beginning and end of things. It acts to some degree as the “guide of life” since it guides the individual in the acquisition of concrete outlook on life, the values and meaning of life, its

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proximate and ultimate ends, and seeks to establish for the individual a scale of values for human conduct.³²

ii. Social Order Role

No society can effectively function without a philosophy of its own. Such philosophy forms the base of which the entire socio-political activities are carried out. When such philosophies are good, the result is that there will be order, progress and development in such a society, and when this is not the case, then it is as a result of an error in such philosophy. Philosophy does this ordering of society through its branches, as its branches are areas of inquiry. Every branch of philosophy is concerned in one way or another, directly or indirectly with particular problems of human experience. Critical thinking or logic for instance, as an area of inquiry in philosophy, deals with various modes of rational thinking and reasoning. With this, philosophy gives man a sense of thinking logically, critically, objectively thereby purging men of their bias, partiality and dogmatism. Philosophy of law examines the legal aspects of human behavior and social relations. The issue of law and order is overemphasized. Philosophy of History is concerned with continuous reminder of the discoveries, achievements, failures and successes of great scholars and thinkers of the past. The knowledge of history provides us a guide for present and future development.

Social and Political philosophy is a branch of philosophy that deals not only with socio-political behavior but also with how man should live, behave and govern himself in society. Today democracy is both a philosophical and political system that has been acknowledged as the best, because it encourages such fundamental principles as equality and freedom. And as such, every political system in the world craves to join this philosophical train because of its dividends to societies that have attempted it. This is in contrast to some other socio-political trends that have been attempted in the past, such as totalitarianism, fascism, monarchy, oligarchy, among others, which in certain ways enslaved man, cutting short his wellbeing. That is to say that every institution of society is based on certain philosophic ideas, whether as law, government, religion, family, marriage, education etc. When sound philosophies are employed in these areas, the result is always stability, peace and order in society. But when the opposite is the case, society becomes chaotic and disorderly.

Having come this far in establishing what philosophy entails, its modes and core functions or values to society in general, we can now attempt to establish its relevance in contemporary time as against what it has come to mean in the eye of the public.

Relevance of Philosophy in Contemporary Times

With the analysis and exposition so far, the question of the relevance of philosophy need not arise, unless it is about the question of its contemporary import, which at this point is our focus. Philosophy has continued to be relevant and plays salient roles in our social wellbeing, as against the common place opinion that it has served it usefulness and that it is no longer relevant in this age of science and technology. However, we must note that science and technology has no being without the being of man. And it is the responsibility of philosophy to continue to proffer better ways of man's social and technological relations. The relevance of philosophy in this contemporary time cannot be overemphasized.

For one, Philosophy has brought about several social revolutions. By a simple definition, social change or revolution means any form of alteration in the social order of the society. It is a kind of paradigm shift. The basis of social change is the transformation in the thought processes

of the human person. Knowledge of philosophy brings about new approaches to issues. This is possible because philosophy sharpens our minds and liberates us from the shackles of prejudices of our age. With the so sharpened, societies through the individuals that possess such philosophical knowledge can now question certain cultures and traditions that are antithetical to reason. Such practices that are not in tandem with reason are to be discarded or modified. This is where the illumination of philosophy shines and brings about social change. Philosophy provides us with the intellectual disposition and stamina to jettison varied superstitious beliefs in our locality.

The world is presently bedeviled by many ills arising from negative nationalism or patriotism, where one ethnic group or nationality excludes others from the category of humanity. Philosophy continues to remind 'us' that we all share one humanity. The fact that one is an African, Caucasian, mongoloid, or any other of the races of the world is simply accidental to the being of the individual person. In this regard therefore, the study of philosophy has certainly played a vital role to unite the world and continues to do so.

It will help Nigerians in this period of continues ethnic rivalry to realize the existential fact that there is no essential difference among all the ethnic groups in Nigeria. This is a significant role that philosophy plays in or should play in our contemporary Nigerian society. This understanding will bring about good relationship among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. The truth is that philosophy, by its very nature, enables man to fit in well both in interpersonal, inter-ethnic and international relationships. It makes for order in the society and for world peace. The idea of human nature and rights from where the declaration of human rights came originated the thoughts of philosophers like: St. Thomas Aquinas, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jacque Rousseau and others. The point here is that the study of philosophy provides us with necessary ingredients for good and authentic human relation that is devoid of tribal sentiments. It provides for an unbiased assessment of human behaviour irrespective of one's ethnic or national affiliation.

As a nation, Nigeria 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 most countries in Africa in particular and the world in general cannot grow or even develop without the aid of philosophy. The Nigerian politicians for instance need at least a little dose of philosophy in order to be truly rational in all their dealings. The role of philosophy in the political sphere in Nigeria 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 Nigerian government to articulate good polices that will touch the lives of the people positively. With the philosophers concern for values, goals, ends of human society, human activity and the means of achieving these, he is better qualified to play the role of helping to determine societal values, development and progress. Philosophy will go a long way towards helping Nigerian Politicians to desist from the politics of acrimony and bitterness. Since philosophy upholds the dignity of human nature, Nigerian politicians will certainly benefit from it given that it will dispose them to be fair in all their dealings. Philosophy certainly will help all Nigerians to be true citizens and to have regard for the constituted authority. This is what Russell meant when he said that: "Philosophy makes us citizens of the universe, not only of one walled city at war with all the rest. In this citizenship of the universe consist man's true freedom and his liberation from the thralldom of narrow hopes and fears".³²

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Philosophy has played a role in the way and manner religion is understood and practiced among humans and societies. From our knowledge of metaphysics, we see that everything that is, derives its being from the being that is necessary. This Being that is by necessity is called different names by different religions; God by Christianity, Allah by Islam, Buddha by Buddhism etc. This is a simple philosophical knowledge. The implication of this understanding is that there is only one Supreme Being that is approached differently. This is what is called “The Paradox of the One and Many in Religion”. The knowledge of philosophy will help the contemporary Nigerians 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 views or otherwise. Basic philosophical knowledge will make Christians, Moslems and Traditional Worshipers in Nigeria and the world over to tolerate each other without any form of violence or hatred. So because of the fact that philosophy is love of wisdom, it will dispose Nigerians to appreciate the good aspects of each religious group that exists. In this regard, Christians and Moslems are to see themselves as collaborators and not as enemies. This is the jurisdiction of philosophy. Philosophy will help to quench the incessant religious violence that is often experienced in the world over. This means that our youth will no longer be pushed to cause violence and mayhem in the society in the name of religion. Philosophy will provide Nigerian youths with the intellectual debt to question certain call of their religious leaders and extremists that are not in consonance with human rationality. Philosophy, therefore, tries to find out reason for accepting anything. In this sense, it has a very important role to play in our contemporary society that is bedeviled with many rogues and charlatans in the name of religious leaders. Today many families are divided because of one prophecy or the other from one ‘man of God’ or the other. Many people have been deceived in the name of religion. Many Nigerians today are at the mercy of the so-called religious leaders. The important role of philosophy in the religious sphere is that it helps us not to accept anything in the name of religion without some basic rational justification. Philosophy frees us from dogmatism and the imprisonment of irrational religious beliefs.

Also, in terms of countries' economies, Philosophy has what it takes to develop the economy. Philosophy, we must recall, is a reflective activity. And it takes only a reflective mind to bring about economic growth and development. It will not be an overstatement to say that Nigerian economic problem is hinged on the lack of philosophical training or foundations. It is clear that when the mind is developed, it will certainly affect other aspects of human endeavor. In as much as 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 and society. 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. And this is what Nigeria needs. We need philosophy to sharpen our creative mind for the purpose of economic growth and development in Nigeria. It is clear that all developed economies of the world have basic philosophical foundations. There is no doubt that an average Nigerian needs some level of philosophical training in order to bring about national economic development. Truly the genuine existence of the world is anchored on ideas. This is why we need to explore Philosophy of Economics as a branch of philosophy; which inquiries concerning rational choice, appraisal of economic outcomes, institutions and processes and the ontology of economic phenomena. This branch of philosophy has a significant role to play

towards the growth and development of economies of the world in general and Nigeria in particular.

Conclusion

The attempt of this paper so far has been to justify the important role of philosophy in our contemporary time. We have tried to do justice to it. However, the claim of the researchers is not that we have explored all the areas of relevance of philosophy in contemporary society. The value of philosophy cannot be overemphasized. The point here is that Nigeria as a people need philosophy; it is a human need. We cannot do without it. Any attempt to run away from philosophy will certainly portend doom for the nation. One thing we must note is that philosophy helps to develop human mind to reason correctly and rationally. When the mind is properly developed rationally, it will translate to human and societal development. This paper, therefore, recommends for at least a little dosage of philosophical training for all, especially in the curriculum of our elementary, secondary and tertiary institutions as has been done in most developed countries of the world.

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