

---

## Philosophy and Human Development: Nigerian Context

Purissima Egbekpalu

<http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ujah.v18i2.4>

### Abstract

*Philosophy as we all know is the mother of all sciences and a universal discipline that directly enquires into the phenomena of life, while it concerns itself with the basic questions and problems confronting man and his existence and the environment in which he lives. It is a humanistic discipline that guides man and offers him the necessary prescriptions to cope with the challenges of life and existence for his well-being, that of others and for the nation at large. This article tries to relate clearly the sacred role of philosophy with regard to development. As an education of the mind it is a very powerful medium through which necessary skills can be acquired to cope with daily life's prospects meaningfully. With philosophy, one develops a rational outlook on life that interrogates the basic assumptions and realities of life; the polis, culture, religion, etc. It grapples with the issues of human conduct and value system of the people to think clearly in traditional manner suitable for their culture about the problems on ground and seeks to proffer humane solutions. It enables a rational system of good behaviour and advises the government to permit the role of reason in its affairs. The philosophical education of the mind on the consciousness and the clarity of the fundamental principles (nation's philosophy) upon which the governance of the nation is constituted helps to inculcate sense of nationalism, patriotism, loyalty and objectivity in the minds of the members, while it empowers them to be non-dogmatic but rational, coherent and act accordingly. To this effect, Philosophers believe that knowledge is*

*power (scientia est potentia) through which one can conquer existential barriers, promote authentic existence and sustainable development. Ignorance on the other hand is an ailment that demotes the standard of life and impedes quality development. It goes to buttress the biblical saying that, “my people perish for lack of knowledge” (Hos. 4:6). In the same vein, our people shrivel for ‘lack of philosophical ideas’ to analyze life’s phenomena properly and make thoughtful decisions that guide their actions towards proper development.*

## **Introduction**

Philosophy is the mother of all sciences. As such, it is a universal discipline that directly enquires into the phenomena of life, while it concerns itself with the basic questions and problems confronting man and his existence and the environment in which he lives. Although it is kind of ambiguous in nature; the character that makes it defy a single definition, it is generally understood to be a humanistic discipline with a reflective activity that can be translated into praxis and a strong quest for wisdom which guide man and offer him the necessary prescriptions to cope with the challenges of life and existence for his well-being, that of others and the society at large. It is a very powerful medium through which necessary skills can be acquired to cope with daily life’s prospects meaningfully as it grapples with the issues of human conduct and value system of the people. Azenabor captures this well when he noted,

Philosophy is humanism... It humanises... It serves humanity. It is relevant to human condition, life and existence...In this respect humanistic philosophy has been

referred to as ‘human-beingism’ Development does not have to be technological- it can also be cultural, intellectual and even moral...Philosophy is important in the process of raising human personality to the highest level, which it is capable of attaining, developing all that is finest and noble in it and turning out first class human beings. It follows that without some tincture of philosophy a man is an imperfect human being.<sup>i</sup>

With philosophy, one develops a rational outlook on life that interrogates the basic assumptions and realities of life; the polis, culture, religion, etc. and thinks clearly in traditional manner suitable for one’s culture about the problems on ground and seeks to proffer humane solutions to the core issues that militate against the intrapersonal, interpersonal and national unity. It enables a rational system of good behaviour and advices the government to permit the role of reason in its affairs.

### **Philosophy as an Art of Proper Education of the Mind**

Education is a powerful instrument of change. Good education is a channel for the actualization of one’s potentials and acquisition of proper skills for appropriate actions and development. The classical Greek philosopher, Aristotle observed that the educated differ from the uneducated as much as the living differs from the dead. Purissima rightly stated,

“education is a dynamic process with an integral formation and approach that portrays knowledge, character and behaviour dimensions. It aims at discerning the truth about reality and integrating such truth in concrete phenomena of life. The educand is not a vessel to be filled up but he is like

a candle to be enkindled in which case his personality naturally, harmoniously and progressively unfolds itself; his potentials, interests, motivations, beliefs, ideals, habits, powers, visions and horizon enlarges according to his natural endowment so that he becomes the best he can in knowledge and character. True development of both the individual and the nation therefore lies in the true and honest actualization of one's abilities for an authentic, happy and peaceful existence.'<sup>ii</sup>

Development is multi-dimensional. It goes beyond mere expansion of infrastructures. Man is at the centre of development. Consequently, a qualitative development must touch man's life who is the agent of development. The development of man therefore is a *conditio-sine-qua-non* for a sustainable development of any community. As both the cause and effect of development, man should be sound in mind and body (*mens sana in corpore sano*) to operate efficiently.

To develop a man in the right direction is to mould his mind appropriately. To suitably shape his mind is to cast his philosophy. Philosophy therefore is the key to meaningful developments; personal and communal. It is a man-oriented discipline. It guides him for just pursuits of ethical and material well-being and upliftment. As an art of education of the mind, philosophy is considered as a universal discipline valid for all. "Poverty of the mind and barrenness of intellect are the most tragic disease that a country can slip into at any time in its history."<sup>iii</sup> It goes to buttress the biblical saying that, "my people perish for lack of knowledge."<sup>iv</sup> And I add, 'my people perish for lack of philosophy'. They shrivel for deficiency of philosophical ideas that

aid to analyze life's phenomena properly, make thoughtful decisions that guide their actions.

To be groomed in the path of creative and critical thinking is the best legacy a country can offer its citizens for it will definitely help them to develop better and improve the conditions of their existence for more qualitative livelihood and well-being that consequently permit the progress on issues of common interest in all spheres of life. This measure is believed to increase personal and national developments. Philosophers believe that knowledge is power (*scientia est potentia*) with which one can conquer existential barriers and promote authentic existence, while ignorance is an ailment that demotes the standard of the same life.

In his inaugural lecture, Prof. Falaiye noted that, “bad leadership is neither in our genes nor in our stars, but in our lack of understanding of the deep philosophical questions in politics.”<sup>v</sup> For this, philosophy must interrogate politics whereby the general principles are studied and reasonably evaluated to favour the dignity and quality of human life. Against this background, the professor of philosophy recommended that since ruling is a skill, essential trainings must be given to our leadership aspirants. At this point, an establishment of a Leadership Training Centre (LTC) with proper curriculum becomes a necessity at the end of which only the successful candidates are selected for appropriate leadership assignments.<sup>vi</sup> To this effect, our philosophers yearn to be given an exclusive opportunity and the required support to make positive impacts in the lives of the citizens; to promote human values, worth and dignity. This will enable them to exercise their leadership skills with the consciousness of the golden maxim of Kantian ethical categorical imperative “*act so that you treat*

*humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only*”<sup>vii</sup> (FMM 47) which has its focal point on the persons as ends in themselves and admonishes fair and just treatment of individuals that ushers sense of nationalism and positive development.

### **Philosophy as the Life Wire of Civilization**

It is an indisputable fact that philosophical ideas shape human history, develop and transform both man and the society for good. With this understanding, the Nigerian Philosophical Association (NPA) in its biennial conference of October 2014 launched a campaign of **ELC<sup>2</sup> = T4D** which means Ethics, Logic, Critical and Creative thoughts (Tools for Development) designed to be taught already from the primary school level as recommended by UNESCO to unleash the limitless power of thought for good developmental objectives of the individuals and the nation at large; to develop ideas that foster personal and communal growth.<sup>viii</sup> Philosophical ideas promote critical and creative thinking as well as moral reasoning that equip man with the appropriate character of right conduct in relation to oneself and to others in building a peaceful, just and united society. According to the famous Greek philosopher Aristotle, the life of right conduct in relation to oneself and others is the enhancement of critical and creative thoughts to know what is good, desire it and do it for the development and promotion of self, others and the global society.

Worldwide down the ages, history has it that almost all the well developed countries have had philosophers at the fulcrum of their activities and particularly at the helm of the affairs of government. The early Greek philosophers set the road map at all spheres of event of life and prominently in the politics that even till today, the

nature of what we have today globally known as state and its structures were the prescriptions of the political philosophers of the time exemplified in Plato.<sup>ix</sup> With the deep conviction that leaders are not born but made, they developed good skilful trainings that produced wise and rational rulers who were disposed for effective policies and their practical implementations. As a guiding principle for good behaviours, philosophy harbours the principles for rational knowledge that could be practically translated into actions. Ethical philosophy lays down precepts that conduct man to good life.

### **The Sacred Roles of Philosophy with Regard to Development**

Development is an existential issue. Man is an integral being. Philosophical education is an unending adventure that has the central concern of both human and national developments. It harmonizes all aspects of man in his developmental journey. Philosophy of education in particular emphasises value education which involves education of character, sound conscience and good moral values through which national unity can be attained and sustained because they create viable humane society encapsulated in respect and responsibility, while maleducation breeds anti-social attitudes and behaviour that hatch disunity, corrupt services, disorder and unbearable conditions that dwindle growth. In order to respond to the nagging quandary of our nation, philosophy exercises the following distinctive sacred normative and analytic tasks:

- It creates a rational outlook that interrogates the basic assumptions and realities of life; the polis, culture, religion, etc.

- It grapples with the issues of human conduct and value system of the people to think clearly in traditional manner suitable for their culture about the problems on ground and seeks to proffer humane solutions to the core issues that militate against the intra personal, interpersonal and national unity.
- It studies, understands, analyzes and criticizes in general the principles of all cultures, while interpreting values and developing better ideas that override cultural differences.
- It critically evaluates the activities of the people and suggests practical guides for healthy and harmonious living.
- It emphasizes and upholds tenaciously those values of consensus that bind citizens together to enhance unity despite their religion, culture, colour, language, geographical locations, etc.
- It enables a rational system of good behaviour and advises the government to permit the role of reason in its affairs.
- It constantly and consciously clarifies the concepts of peace, unity and progress as it creates awareness for fuller participation of everyone in the society in freedom of thought and action.
- The philosophical education of the mind on the consciousness and the clarity of the fundamental principles (nation's philosophy) upon which the governance of the nation is constituted helps to inculcate a sense of nationalism and patriotism.
- Finally, the use of force on people does not assure peace, unity and lasting development as the complaints of people are much stronger than military weapons. Rather, philosophical dispositions which avail the citizens the spirit of patriotism,

loyalty and objectivity empower them at the same time to be non-dogmatic but rational, coherent and act to accordingly.

### **Philosophy and Development: Nigerian Factor**

We live in a world of rapid change that from time to time, the education of the mind and the continuous re-enactment of the nation's philosophy on the fundamental principles upon which the governance of the nation is constituted and transmitted down the generation is essential for proper attitude and behaviour. This helps greatly to investigate into the problems of the people and find new and appropriate ways to regulate human conducts in our changing society. Philosophers are quite conscious of the teething problems confronting us that militate against the unity of our nation, our development, our human dignity, the quality of our life as well as the purpose and goal of our existence. The re-ordering of the national values, priorities, beliefs and principles in the building of a new society of freedom, equality, sustainable development, peace and unity necessitate a new direction of thought and action in peoples' relational network which is the major work of philosophy. Philosophers therefore concern themselves so much with possible transformation of people and the society through viable changes in thought pattern in order to create harmonious relationships among those factors of discord so to capture the essence of our existence that will aid ultimate development. Oladipo highlights the elevation of mankind as the practical mission of philosophy whereby he delineates enlightenment, open-mindedness, broadening of sensibilities, sensitivity to human ideals such as tolerance, cooperation, etc. as the features for the elevation that encourage sustainable development.<sup>x</sup>

The national policy on the philosophy of Nigerian education<sup>xi</sup> built on the very philosophy of the nation laid down five main objectives which include:

- A free and democratic society
- A just and egalitarian society
- A united, strong and self-reliant nation
- A great and dynamic economy
- A land full of bright and equal opportunities for all citizens

A philosophical analysis of these beautiful objectives will definitely help to create a platform that encourages equal treatment of the citizens, while at the same time discourages the favour of the strong against the weak, the rich against the poor, etc. as these clog the wheel of both individual and national development and makes the nation to suffer a lot of setbacks. Resultantly, qualitative and sustainable development can better be strengthened through the education of the mind on the general philosophy of the nation through useful philosophical applications. The application of philosophical principles and the continuous re-enactment of the nation's philosophy will help to investigate into the problems, develop the citizens and find new and appropriate ways to regulate human conducts in our changing society.

### **Conclusion**

Education is a powerful instrument of change. Philosophy is a man-oriented discipline which guides life for a just pursuit of good for ethical and material well-being and upliftment. Man is an integral being who maintains a central position in development. Development is multi-dimensional. It goes beyond mere amplification of infrastructures. Qualitative and sustainable development must touch the lives of the people who are the agents

of development. The development of man is therefore, a *conditio-sine-qua-non* for a sustainable development of any community.

**Purissima Egbekpalu**  
Madonna University, Okija  
*epury@rocketmail.com*

### References

- <sup>i</sup> Azenabor, G., *Philosophical Psychology* (2008), Promocomss Ltd. Ibadan, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. pp. 32-38.
- <sup>ii</sup> Purissima, E., A paper presented during the Annual International Convention of Experts and Intellectuals, Madonna University, Elele, Rivers State, on the theme: “*World Peace Through Education and development: The Works of Fr. Edeh,*” from 3<sup>rd</sup> through 10<sup>h</sup> November 2013.
- <sup>iii</sup> Umezurike, G.M. (1989), *Uplifting the Social Education and moral standards in Contemporary Nigerian Education*.
- <sup>iv</sup> Hosea 4:6
- <sup>v</sup> Falaiye, O. A, *A Philosopher interrogates African Polis: How Can We Get It Right*. Inaugural Lecture Series, University of Lagos, May 2012, pp. 30-31.
- <sup>vi</sup> Cf. Ibid. P.39
- <sup>vii</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of Metaphysics of Morals*, trans., Beck, L.W., Indianapolis, Bobbs Merrill Library of Liberal Arts, 1959, 47.
- <sup>viii</sup> Cf. *Nigerian Philosophical Association (NPA)*, Biennial Conference October, University of Lagos, 2014
- <sup>ix</sup> Cf. *Plato’s Republic IV and V*.
- <sup>x</sup> Cf. Oladipo, *Challenges of African Philosophy in the twenty-first Century: In Core Issues in African Philosophy*, 2006.



