

## Philosophical Education as a Tool for Individual and National Development

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**Abstract.** Africans have been exposed to formal education since the expansionists' decision to colonize their territory and rule them either directly or indirectly. Education was necessary for effective communication, especially, to make the colonized do the colonizer's bidding. This type of education probably informed Frantz Fanon's description of the African as "Black Skin, White Masks".

Even after over five decades of the independence of most African countries, the goal of education in most of these countries seem to still be in line with that of the colonizers even though there are bold statements on paper in terms of their philosophies of education. Definitely, Africans have tried as much as their counterparts from other parts of the world to master nature in order to subdue it. However, they have not done enough to understand themselves enough to be able to dominate nature. This is a gap that must be filled.

Filling the above identified gap requires the philosophical sermon 'Man, know thyself'. The African needs to know who he is to be able to identify how to adapt available theories to his situation as well as seek new ways of addressing his peculiar needs.

This paper argues that philosophical education- education that transcends formal, science and technology based education- is necessary for individual and national development. It is our view that unless Africans imbibe the Socratic dictum and use it to wonder about themselves and everything that surrounds them, efforts at developing both the individual and the state would continue to yield little results.

### 1. Introduction

Outside the University, the impression is often held that Philosophy is nothing more than a theoretical activity which begins and ends in the classroom. This is not so. The situation is worsened when you ask students and even teachers of philosophy what their vocation is. Most, if not all, will likely begin by saying that Philosophy does not have a universal, univocal definition and proceed to tell their audience why. The competence demonstrated in explaining why they cannot agree on what their vocation is makes some outsiders wonder if they should not pitch their tent with contemporary school of linguistic analysis which sees Philosophy as clarification of language. This attitude, too, is not proper.

In the midst of the cacophony of voices on what Philosophy is, the non-philosopher is at sea as to what the usefulness of such an area of study could be. This paper aims to show the relevance of the knowledge derived from philosophy to the development of the individual and society at large. We attempt a clarification of the concepts of philosophy and philosophical education. We then look at the issues of individual and national development and the relevance of philosophical education.

### 2. Philosophy and Philosophical Education

This section attempts to offer some views on what Philosophy is, and what constitutes philosophical education. In doing this, we are

not oblivious of our earlier reference to Philosophy as a discipline with no single universally accepted definition. What is done here, therefore, is an overview of Philosophy.

## 2.1 What is Philosophy?

We begin this segment of the paper by looking at some of the ways in which different philosophers admit that there is the problem of definition in Philosophy. Omoregbe (2005:1) says 'If you ask ten different philosophers what Philosophy is, you are likely to get ten different answers'. It implies that the simple question "What is Philosophy?" is difficult to answer. Ogunrowole (2004:1) maintains:

*It is often heard among students that there is no single universally accepted definition of Philosophy. Such a view is not infrequently stated even by some academic philosophers. The immediate impression you are likely to derive from this is perhaps that everyone is to his own kind of definition. Therefore whatever definition you have is inadequate and that is it.*

Momoh (1991:9) adds that 'Differences in the definitions or characterizations of Philosophy go back to differences in the perceptions of experiences and of cultures'. Unah (1995:2), on this matter, submits that:

This lack of agreement among Philosophers as to the meaning of their discipline need not make any of us unhappy. The nature of philosophical problems is such that philosophers cannot but disagree.

Ogbinaka (2010:3) furthers this position thus: 'Attempting to define Philosophy may be uncomfortable and embarrassing to both the beginner and his teacher...' What all the above point to is that there is no agreement among philosophers as to how to define their vocation. However, no philosopher goes to the field without a theoretical foundation for his enterprise whether or not others agree with him. In what follows, we offer some perspectives on the subject of the definitions, descriptions and conceptions of Philosophy.

Bertrand Russell views as philosophy, the asking of fundamental questions of existence

which religion and science cannot answer. According to him:

*Philosophy... is something intermediate between theology and science. Like theology, it consists of speculations on matters as to which definite knowledge has, so far, been unascertainable; but like science, it appeals to human reason rather than to authority, whether that of tradition or that of revelation (Russell: 1996: 13).*

Russell goes further to identify the Philosophical questions as follows:

*Is the world divided into mind and matter, and if so, what is mind and what is matter? Is mind subject to matter, or is it possessed of independent powers? Has the universe any unity or purpose?. Is it evolving towards some goal? Are there really laws of nature, or do we believe in them only because of our innate love of order? Is man what he seems to the astronomer, tiny lump of impure carbon and water impotently crawling on a small and unimportant planet? Or is he what he appears to Hamlet? Is he perhaps both at once? Is there a way of living that is noble and another that is base, or are all ways of living merely futile? If there is a way of living that is noble, in what does it consist, and how shall we achieve it? Must the good be eternal in order to deserve to be valued, or is it worth seeking even, if the universe is inexorably moving towards death? Is there such a thing as wisdom, or is what seems such merely the ultimate refinement of folly? (Ibid.).*

For Russell, the studying of the above questions constitutes the business of philosophy.

Moreso, Plato sees philosophy in the light of the search for the truth. A philosopher, according to him, is a man whose heart is fixed on reality. For Aristotle, Philosophy is the study of essence in itself, with a view to having knowledge of the truth. For Martin Heidegger, Philosophy is the correspondence to the being of being. On the part of Ludwig Wittgenstein and Alfred J. Ayer, Philosophy deals with critical analysis of language.

African philosophers are not left out of the attempts to define their vocation. Joseph Omoregbe takes a panoramic look at the

attempts at defining Philosophy and offers two possible definitions viz:

*Philosophy is a rational search for answers to the questions that arise in the mind when we reflect on human experience. Philosophy is a rational search for answers to the basic questions about the ultimate search for answers to the basic questions about the ultimate meaning of reality as a whole and of human life in particular (2007:3).*

Omogbe's definitions call attention to the very beginnings of Philosophy. Philosophy arose as a result of man's wonder about the meaning of reality and the problems of existence. Philosophy was derived from two Greek words, 'Philein' and 'Sophia' which translate into "Love of wisdom". Wisdom about what constitutes reality and wisdom about the nature of problems of existence include the issue of the purpose of human life. Dwelling on this last aspect Freud (1961: 23-4) observes that 'The question of the purpose of human life has been raised countless times; it has never received a satisfactory answer and perhaps does not admit of one'. The puzzle that the purpose of human life in particular, and that of existence, in general, pose makes the asking of fundamental and philosophical questions to continue to be relevant. This is the nature of Philosophy.

Campbell Momoh posits that 'A genuine philosophy or a philosophical position is a direct offspring of the thinker's culture, experience, history and times'. (Momoh:1991:15). On the basis of his acceptance that philosophy has many definitions, he re-presents some of the definitions offered by John Edward Bentley in his work *Philosophy, an Outline History* and John Passmore in his article "Philosophy" in the Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Some of the definitions offered by Bentley are:

- Philosophy is the search for a comprehensive view of nature, an attempt at a universal explanation of things.
- The business of Philosophy is to analyze the concepts of science.
- The task of philosophy is to change the world.

- Philosophy is the pursuit of wisdom and its formulation in words.
- Philosophy is the art of linguistic analysis.
- Philosophy interprets the knowledge of life, i.e. establishes the relation of things in logical mathematical progression.
- Philosophy is a reflection on the achievement and cultures of civilization, philosophical reflection is the power to ask questions about life, to solve problems, and to plan conduct, the capacity to look before and after.
- Philosophy aims at expedient and right actions.

On his own part, John Passmore's definitions include the following, but not limited to them:

- Philosophy is a direct personal intuition of general conclusions.
- Philosophy is speculation controlled by criticism.
- Philosophy is the uncovering of nonsense.
- Philosophy is the art of life.
- Philosophy is nothing else but prudence.
- Philosophy is the scientific knowledge of man.
- Philosophy is the theory of being.
- Philosophy is the theory of culture.
- Every philosophical problem is conceptual or logical or linguistic.
- Philosophy is a critical discussion of critical discussion.

Momoh does not see any problem with any definition because of the differences in the philosophers' cultures, experiences and epochs.

For Kolawole Ogundowole, philosophy is the first form of theoretical knowledge. He reviews the origins of philosophy and posits that 'Philosophy took shape in the struggle of furnish mankind with a rational explanation of the world for effective communication and enhanced practical activity' (2004: 4).

Jim Unah, building on the Aristotelian tradition which views philosophy as an activity that arises from wonder, sees philosophy as 'A reflection of human experience' (Unah: 1995: 2).

Taking cognizance of the reasons for the avalanche of definitions of philosophy, and while we neither totally accept nor reject the above given definitions and others, we define philosophy as man's attempt to understand the universe. To do this, man asks fundamental questions about reality. Sometimes, he is able to proffer answers to the questions he asks. Sometimes, he is not able to. Whether or not he is able to answer these fundamental questions, asking them, in the first place, constitutes philosophy.

## 2.2 The Value of Philosophy

The question is often asked as to what the value of Philosophy is. The question pertains to both the individual and society at large. To begin with, the student of Philosophy is sometimes faced with such embarrassing questions such as: 'what does Philosophy teach you?' 'What do you intend to do with Philosophy?' 'Of what use is Philosophy to society?' Questions about the value of Philosophy are not restricted to the student. They go also to philosophers-professional and academic. To such people, the question can be summed up as 'Why Philosophy?'

Confronted with the above questions and many more, the student of Philosophy, more often than not, finds himself in a dilemma, especially if he is in Philosophy for a future career or job opportunities. Philosophy does not teach the student how to be a lawyer, banker, carpenter, driver, medical doctor or a mason. It does not, therefore, put its student at any advantage when competing with his colleagues who are trained in the specialized disciplines. However, both the philosopher and the student need not despair if they know what they want from Philosophy. Knowing what one wants from Philosophy begins with what his perception of Philosophy is.

Wondering about the question 'Why study Philosophy?', Joad (1965: 15) identifies the concern of Philosophy. According to him: *Some of us want to know the meaning of this surprising world in which we find ourselves, to understand the significance and, if possible, to*

*discover the purpose of human life in general and of our own lives in particular. What is the point of life and how ought it to be lived? Philosophy concerns itself with these questions, not aspiring to answer them with finality, but considering and discussing them and studying the answers which have seemed convincing to greater men than ourselves.*

On the strength of the above identification of the concern of Philosophy, Joad sees philosophy as 'A record of the soul's adventures in the cosmos' (Ibid.) and posits that the answer to the question of "Why study philosophy is 'To satisfy the impulse of curiosity' (Ibid). Definitely, the above position is not gratifying for any person who intends to make a profit on his philosophical investment. Nor is it gratifying for anyone who looks up to Philosophy to mechanically solve existential problems. However, to those who seek higher values that transcend the material, Philosophy is worthwhile. No wonder, therefore, that Joad recanted his earlier cited position on the value of Philosophy.

Again, Philosophy may look purely abstract when viewed from the perspective of modern psychologists, including what Abraham Maslow terms 'Maintenance needs. Maintenance needs are within the realms of feeding, clothing and housing. The appreciation of Philosophy begins when one transcends the pecuniary bread and butter needs of life to actualizing needs. While this does not mean that studying Philosophy necessarily leads to self-actualization, 'Philosophy assists by promoting the ideal of self-actualization, or what psychotherapist Carl Rogers terms the fully functioning person' (Barry: 1980: 21).

Also, Bertrand Russell is of the view that those who, comparing Philosophy to science, expect practical results, do so as a result of their misconception of the kind of good Philosophy offers. For him,

Utility does not belong to philosophy. If the study of philosophy has any value at all for others than the students of philosophy, it must be only incidentally, through its effects upon the lives of those who study it. It is in these effects,

therefore, if anywhere, that the value of philosophy must be primarily sought (Russell: 1998: 89).

The value of Philosophy is, therefore, to be found in its enrichment of our intellectual imagination and its ability to foster a union between the mind and the universe.

There are other important values of philosophy such as: political substantiation (Ogundowole: 2004: 21-5); open mindedness and multiple approaches to problem solving; the ability to think logically.

### 2.3 Philosophical Education

By philosophical education, we do not mean formal education but the education, sagacity, wisdom which Philosophy has given man. Education has been variously defined or described by different scholars. R. S. Peters has defined it as a systematic training and instruction geared towards the development of ability, character, physical and mental powers of the individual, through the careful dissemination of knowledge (1980:1). G. F. Kneller defines education as the process by which any society, through schools, colleges, universities and other institutions deliberately transmits its cultural heritage, i.e. its accumulated knowledge, values, skills, from one generation to another (1964: 20).

In our own view, education is the deliberate guiding of man with a view to making him useful to both himself and society. Such a guide includes ideas, instructions, admonitions, commendations, condemnation of unacceptable deeds and acknowledgement of good ones.

In line with the above conception of education, we take philosophical education as philosophy's deliberate guiding of man with a view to making him useful to both himself and society. This differs from Philosophy of Education because why the former concerns itself with guiding Man, the latter beams the searchlight of Philosophy on the concepts, contents and methodologies used in education.

From the ancient to the contemporary epoch, Philosophy has guided man with its different postulations. Most important to us in this paper is the Socratic Dictum, "Man, know thyself". There are other philosophical ideas which include the underlisted:

- Man is the measure of all things by Protagoras.
- Flux Philosophy by Heraclitus.
- Philosophical Atomism by Leucippus and Democritus.
- Dialectical idealism – Hegel.
- Dialectical materialism by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.
- Negritude by Leopold Senghor.
- Ujamaah by Julius Nyerere.
- Philosophical Consciencism by Kwame Nkrumah.
- Self-reliance by Kolawole Ogundowole.

In what follows we take the Socratic Dictum, "Man know thyself" as the basic philosophical education. The reason for this choice is not farfetched: the study of man is essential to Philosophy. However, in spite of his contributions to universal civilization, the African does not seem to have discovered himself. He still sees the world in the prism of the Europeans who themselves, strive to attain higher realms of humanity. He has become a hybrid as a result of his contact with the West, Slavery, Colonialism, racialism, Islam and his penchant for mimicking the colonizers.

Despite the universality of man, there are areas where individuals differ. Ruch and Anyanwu are of the view that:

*While human nature and its dignity is universal and common to all men, each human person is also a particular mix of all the elements which go into his making. This particular mix determines his individual personality, i.e. his character and temperament and his physical individuality. Physically people differ from each other in size, weight, age, health, speed of reaction, resistance to fatigue, skin pigmentation, blood group, tissue types, allergies, etc... Psychologically they differ in talents, experiences, abilities intelligence, memory, sense acuity, etc. These individual*

*differences are partly due to physical and psychological inheritance* (1981: 181).

The above accounts for the universality of man as well as the basis for individual, group and regional differences. Regional differences are included because, to a considerable extent, the psychological characteristics of a person are also forged by social influences and pressures, education, environment, mode of life, personal experiences, etc. (Ibid). On the basis of the above, we submit that while the African personality is a member of the universal human community, he possesses some distinctive characteristics, just like his counterparts in other parts of the world possess theirs.

### **3. Philosophical Education, Individual and National Development**

This section explores the relevance of philosophical education to individual and national development. We recall that what we consider as the basic philosophical education in this paper is the Socratic Dictum “Man, know thyself”. It follows, therefore, that what we advocate, here, is that man needs to know himself, understand himself, know his strengths and failings for him to achieve development for both himself and society. Our attention is particularly on the African personality because not much, if any, of our social structures are built on the understanding of the African. Africa and Africans seem to have so far reversed Protagoras by saying ‘Anything, but not man, is the measure of all things’. This reversal is wrong and accounts for the prevailing backwardness. For there to be meaningful individual and national development, we must establish the African identity because, as Joseph Ki-Zerbo puts it ‘Without identity, we are an object of history, an instrument used by others, a tool’ (2007: 97). There must be a development model which takes into cognizance the African personality. But then, we need to ask the question, ‘What is development?’.

Our aim of clarifying the concept of development is to have a panoramic view of the concept before putting it into our own context. Development has been viewed variously by

different scholars. However, whatever the conception one has about development, it cannot be devoid of qualitative movement from one stage or state to another. In this wise, Rodney (1972:9) says:

*Development in human society is a many-sided process. At the level of the individual it implies increase skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being.*

For Ogundowole, development ‘Is the ability to influence both internal and external changes: the ability to recognize when old solutions no longer work and new ones have to be found, and the ability to know how this is to be found’ (Ogundowole:2011: 123). In this conception of development, emphasis is on the self because development is not the ability to change oneself to suit the needs of others nor is it a state in which one has access to the finished products of neocolonist or of any advanced foreign country. Unlike Rodney and Ogundowole, Gauba seems to limit his conception of development to society. According to him:

*Development may be identified as a process in which a system or institution is transformed into stronger, more organized, more efficient and more effective form and proves to be more satisfying in terms of human wants and aspirations* (Gauba: 2007: 476).

Gauba’s emphasis on society notwithstanding, reference to qualitative movement is obvious in his description or identification of development. Amartya Sen takes development to a twenty-first century level by equating it with freedom. According to him:

*Development requires the removal of major sources of unfreedom: poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance or over activity of repressive states* (Sen:2000: 3).

Freedom enables the agency of development to be a constitutive part of it as well as strengthening of free agencies of other kinds.

There are different types of development. They include: economic development, political development, cultural development, etc.

Whichever definition or conception of development one holds, it is pertinent to bear in mind that development is a process. And, realizing the importance of the African identity to our conception of development and the need for a qualitative leap from the current development situations in most African States, we adopt Ogunrowole's view of development as the ability to influence both internal and external changes: the ability to recognize when old solutions no longer work and new ones have to be found, and the ability to know how this is to be found.

Most development theories are based on the liberal partitioning of the world into the developed/underdeveloped or developing axis. By this, most of the countries of Asia, Latin America and Africa belong to the class of third world or developing or underdeveloped countries. This categorization has its implications, not only on the affected countries, but also their citizens. When a country and its economy are categorized as underdeveloped, backward, stagnant, etc, is it possible for its people to be seen as any better? This approach is wrong. But do Africans and African states see themselves differently?

If the African personality is innately co-operative, equalitarian and communal, the task of self-retrieval should not be an uphill one as it has been to date. Despite our contention of the liberal division of the world into developed and underdeveloped countries, we are of the view that Africa is not near where should be in terms of development. Our contention is informed by our dialectical materialist position that no country has yet attained the full circle of development and none is continually on a parallel line to development. All countries of the world have the potentials to develop and keep developing, only at different rates.

The backward state of African countries today, is not because of lack of identity or development theories. Identity and development theories abound. The problem is that available theories are not adapted to real life situations. Moreso, such theories do not reckon with the African experience. When we understand the African

personality, we would know what he is made of, what he can give to society, what he expects from society and would be able to project his likely mode of resistance to state policies as well as his attitude to nation-building. Today, Africans are being asked to build nation states in countries where the peoples do not know who they are. Can one talk of development when the individual or the state changes to suit somebody else? Can a state develop when her citizens are an appendage of other people? Can a country be said to be developed when it only serves as the warehouse of a manufacturing foreign country? Definitely No! The above questions arise because some aspects of the life of the African remain unexamined. Africans need to pay more attention to Philosophy, which, according to Aristotle, began with wonder. Wondering about reality, about what is known and what is unknown, would lead Africans to the Socratic dictum, 'An unexamined life is not worth living.' Accordingly,

For Socrates, the only life that is worthwhile for a human being or human society is the one whose basis and goals have been thoroughly examined, searched out. This means that we should be self-critical, prepared to subject our own lives – our ideas, presuppositions, beliefs, values, goals – to serious examination, if we should be what we want to be and know what things are most worthwhile (Gyekye: 2004:71).

#### 4. Conclusion

Nation-building is an essential part of political development. There can be no meaningful national development without nation building. Nation-building cannot meaningfully take place without affirming the identities of the different nationalities which compose the state. This compels the affirmation of the Socratic Dictum, 'Man, know thyself' so that he can determine what is good for both himself and society. The paper has attempted an exploration into unbundling the enormous possibilities locked up in man to develop society. Our adopted philosophical education, 'Man, know thyself' was explored as a tool for individual and national development. Many aspects of the African life give credence to the view that many

Africans live unexamined lives and until these change, there cannot be meaningful individual and national development.

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