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Philosophy and National Development

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Abstract:

The question, "Of what relevance is philosophy to human development?" provokes a doubting thought in regard to the relevance and functional role philosophy plays in promoting the socio-political and economic development of a country as against what other professional disciplines like Accounting, Law, Engineering, Medicine have been doing. However, contemporary Africa has experienced and continues to experience enormous distress which these other professions have not been able to revolve. Under such circumstances, eyes turn to the philosopher for solutions. Thus, the urgent need to reflect on Africa's journey towards redemptive healing and human development becomes the philosopher's task. If philosophy is the love for wisdom and wisdom is not just a correct application of knowledge, but the active use of intelligence which transverses all fields of learning, philosophy cannot be undermined in any way. Philosophy is founded on reflection, curiosity, criticality and objectivity; it also aims at rational explanation of reality. With its power of logic and critical thinking, philosophy has become an indispensable instrument of study for all disciplines. Hence, this paper shall adopt a conceptual analytical method to critically appraise the relevance of philosophy and philosophers to human and national development in the contemporary world.

Keywords: *philosophy, wisdom, development, logic, critical thinking*

1. Introduction

It is not an understatement to say that philosophy has been under siege from the ancient Greek period till date. Many people grossly misunderstood what philosophy is all about. It is therefore high time we started clearing the coast on this misconception showing in practical terms the relevance of philosophy to human and national development. Philosophy in the contemporary period needs to be modeled towards affecting governmental policies and national development. Philosophers should be encouraged to move away from mere rhetoric of argumentation to issues that can concretely enhance national development in terms of infrastructures, good health care, good transportation, corporate educational system, elimination of corruption, poverty and unemployment to mention but a few. The world is now looking forward to seeing how philosophy could reorient the society to achieve development beyond the celebration of the beauty of rhetorics and argumentation.

Philosophers of old contributed immensely to human and social development, and much more is expected in the contemporary world. Philosophy is charged with not showing concrete relevance to current market demand and national development. No wonder, a bill sponsored in 2011 to establish Nigerian National Philosophy Commission (NNPC), to develop a clear national philosophy/ideology for the nation elicited this naïve response from a senator from the North:

- If I want advice on financial matters, I would go to the economic institute and get it. Again, if I need advice on housing matters, I would go to relevant commission or institute for it. But what would a philosophic institute or commission do for me. Will they advice me on how to argue with my wife on how much it should cost to cook a pot of soup? (<http://www.nairaland.com/661313/nigeria-needs-nigerian-national-philosophy>)

Of course, the entire Senate burst into laughter and the bill died a natural death.

Indeed, philosophers are not electricians, mechanics or physicians that offer concrete services, or put food on the table, rather, philosophy offers critical and evaluative mind-set needed not just to prepare good food and a balanced diet, but also to produce the needed food for the growth of the economy. The very essence of philosophy is love for wisdom; wisdom is not just a correct application of knowledge, but an active intelligence which transverses all fields of learning. The philosophers' laboratory is the human mind, and if one is able to capture and put the mind into its proper perspective, every other thing will fall into its rightful place. Put the best policies in place, if the people' mind-set lack morals and proper understanding of the fundamentals of their essence and the need for morality, all efforts will eventually come to nothing worthwhile.

Development is not all about material development but moral/spiritual development, particularly, the development of the mind-set. Since, philosophy relies heavily on the power of reflection, curiosity, criticality and objectivity (power of logic and critical thinking), it is therefore the needful to solve problems of human existence and other problematics contained therein. Philosophy is not totally an abstract discipline unable to solve human problems, as the naïve and uncritically minded people would say, rather, it is quite pragmatic to solving human problems by its power of logic and critical thinking. This paper shall adopt a conceptual analytical method to critically appraise philosophy and show its relevance to solving human and national development problems.

2. Defining Philosophy

Defining philosophy is itself a question of philosophy. Every discipline has its subject matter of study but when a discipline reflects on itself, it becomes philosophy of that discipline. For example, science studies natural phenomena and the phenomena of the society. It does not study itself. When science reflects on itself, it becomes the philosophy of science; there and then what it does is to examine a number of philosophic questions such as "What is science?" "What is scientific method?" "Does scientific truth provide us with the truth about the universe and reality?" and "What is the value of science?" to mention but a few.

Philosophy evolved from the Greek word, *philosophia*, which literarily means "love of wisdom". Wisdom is not synonymous to knowledge; it is the active use of intelligence and practical application of knowledge. Wisdom is not something passive that a person simply possesses without applying. Philosophy is a reflective discipline borne out of curiosity, but very complex and controversial to define. However, different philosophers define it in perspective. Philosophy is better described than defined, but obviously, it is a discipline founded on the power of reflection, curiosity, criticality and objectivity; it gives attention to details; seeks to understand the mysteries of existence and reality; tries to discover the nature of truth and knowledge, and raises basic values for human existence. It examines the relationships between humanity and nature, and between the individual and society. Pecorino (2000) explains philosophy as an activity of thought, critical and comprehensive, and a quest after wisdom; its intellectual process includes both an analytic and synthetic mode of operation. He asserts:

- Philosophy is a critical and comprehensive process of thought, it involves resolving confusion, unmasking assumptions, revealing presuppositions, distinguishing importance, testing positions, correcting distortions, looking for reasons, examining world-views and questioning conceptual frameworks. It also includes dispelling ignorance, enriching understanding, broadening experience, expanding horizons, developing imagination, controlling emotion, exploring values, fixing beliefs by rational inquiry, establishing habits of acting, widening considerations, synthesizing knowledge and questing for wisdom (Pecorino, 2000)

Philosophy is a process function; an activity that responds to society's demand for wisdom, bringing together all that we know in order to obtain what we value. In the light this, philosophy is part of the activity of human growth, an integral and essential part of the process of education. The common ground between philosophy and education is development of the total intellect of a person and the realization of human potentials. Philosophy is therefore the study that:

- seeks to understand the mysteries of existence and reality. It tries to discover the nature of truth and knowledge, and to find what is of basic value and importance in life. It also examines the relationships between humanity and nature and between the individual and society. Philosophy arises out of wonder, curiosity, and the desire to know and understand. Philosophy is thus a form of inquiry--a process of analysis, criticism, interpretation, and speculation (Anonymous, 2004)

In fact, philosophy is the mother of all disciplines; the mother of reasoning and author of learning. Its use of logic and critical thinking made it an indispensable instrument of study for all disciplines. It arises from contemplating on wonders with curious desire to know and understand phenomena in the universe. Philosophy is a form of inquiry which includes a process of analysis, criticism, interpretation, and speculation. By its method of criticism and judgment, which is sometimes referred to as dialectic, it attempts to subject beliefs to rational proof and discover fundamental truths about essence and existence.

3. Why Study Philosophy

The practical reason why we study philosophy is to acquire valuable set of skills which builds one to becoming an active inquirer, thinker, and problems solver. Philosophers are trained to develop skills of critical thinking, argumentation, information management, research, communication, abstract reasoning, and analytic and synthetic reasoning (Adler, 2000). In the light of this, students of philosophy are trained to identify fundamental questions about their essence and existence, and formulate their own worldview through the process of clear thought, critical thinking and argumentation. Philosophy is not just about learning other philosophers' thought or passively memorizing their ideas, but it lies in the habit of exhibiting the power of reflection, reasoning and critical thinking to solving human problems. Honderich (1995) argues that classical philosophers pose practical and concrete questions such as: Is there a best way to live? Is it better to be just or unjust? Or Do humans have free will? Philosophy generates and influences ideas, and it is a well-known fact that ideas generated, conceived and upheld by a society definitely have profound implications on the belief system of such society and actions performed by its citizenry.

Ideas and thoughts in philosophy are critical and comprehensive, analytic and synthetic, practical and theoretical, logical and empirical. They are critical because they attempt to criticize assumptions, meanings, word usages, beliefs, and theories, and therefore, develop clear definitions and formulations of propositions and retain maximum precision in expressions. Philosophy upholds logical criteria of consistency and coherency, that is, consistency without contradiction. It adopts empirical criteria of adequacy and applicability by which all that is given in experience is accounted for within an analysis or explanation. Philosophy is comprehensive because it attempts to resolve all social and human problems. Philosophic thought is synthetic as it attempts to relate and coordinate all scientific knowledge providing values to make them work and beneficial to humanities.

Philosophic thoughts are practical since they could be adopted to solve practical problems in the society. Philosophy advances theories which helps to analyze, explain, and assist in planning; resolving practical problems of assumptions, beliefs, presuppositions, common sense, ideas and the efficacy of current practices, and it is only from the perspective of philosophic thought that such an inquiry can take place. Philosophic thought is also speculative, pursuing questions that do not bear directly on practical matters (formulating principles that govern thought and action), as well as ultimate metaphysical issues.

4. What is National Development?

Development is about growth and advancement in the socio-economic and political development of any nation. It is that which essentially sustenance growth of any nation. Lawal (2011) argues that the development of a nation can only be measured in terms of the extent that the nation is able to provide qualitative life for her citizenry. He attached development strictly to the quality of life of the people, and not to merely *per capita* income or the nation's GDP (Gross Domestic Product). Gboyega (2003) on his own part defines development as an idea that embodies all attempts to improve the conditions of human existence in all ramifications. Development implies improvement in material well-being of all citizens, not to the most powerful or the rich alone, but demands that poverty and unequal access to good things of life be removed or reduced to the barest minimal. Iroegbu (2005:290) defines development as "an unwrapping of potentials, unveiling, outgrowth or growing out of what was enveloped, hidden or latent...it is epigenetic in the sense of being the realization of new or additional data, forms or systems via the combination or employment of already present material object" while Berger (1976:35) claims that it entails "good growth and desirable modernization". Ogundowole (1998) sees development as a rounded and multidimensional phenomenon. He asserts, "development may mean mere mechanical notion, special displacement of object, forward and backward, upward and downward. It may mean rectilinear, rotatory, oscillating..." Ogundowole (1998:92). Most importantly, development revolves around human development.

National development refers to the ability of a nation to improve the welfare of its citizens by providing them with social amenities like quality education, portable water, transportation, health care and other essential infrastructures. Naomi (1995) says, national development is not just about economic growth or the provision of social amenities alone, but an equitable distribution of amenities. Nnoli (1981:36) conceives development as "a dialectical phenomenon in which the individual and society interact with their physical and biological environment transforming them for their own betterment and that of humanity at large". But, Nigeria lacks the necessary technologies to explore her own resources; she relied heavily on foreign equipments and expertise. Nigeria is rich in natural gas and oil with the largest gas field in Africa, yet, she does not mine even a tenth part of it because she lacks appropriate equipment and expertise needed to develop the gas industry.

Besides, Nigeria continually experiences a high degree of corruption, indiscipline, non-patriotism and bad leadership which draw-back development in the country. The nation is underdeveloped because the managers of her economy are corrupt and not sincere: her leaders are only interested in embezzling the wealth of the nation. There are media reports of huge amount of embezzlement at every sector of the economy running into millions and billions of Naira and dollars every day. Funny enough, no culprit had ever been brought to book. All we hear are media propaganda and prosecutions. No economy will grow if its managers turn the state to an instrument of capital accumulation, and ignore the provision of the necessary infrastructures required to improve the welfare of its citizenry. Corruption and development are antithetical to each other, the two cannot cohabit, where one is present, the other suffers. Mimiko (1998) submits that a very good development plan supervised by a hardened corrupt state can hardly witness any form of development.

The strategies of development of any nation are contained in the development plan of that state. Nigeria had had series of good and well articulated development plans (development plan targeted at corruption, employment and reduction in poverty level), but all had been failing, not because the strategies contained therein are not worthwhile, but because such development plans lack proper and sincere implementation or because of corruption and bad leadership. Nigeria has not been able to produce honest and sincere leadership that would implement her strategic plans sincerely and honestly. The question now is, which way out? Since this paper had identified the mind as a major organ of change and development, it necessary something is done about the mind. Good enough, the mind has been identified as the workshop or laboratory of the philosopher. Therefore, philosophy inadvertently becomes a panacea to solving the problem of corruption and bad leadership that is currently standing as a bane national development in Nigeria. The mind-set of both the managers of the economy and the citizenry has to be worked-on and the value system of the society, repositioned. With its power logic and critical thinking, philosophy could disabuse the mind of the people against corruption and insensitivity to their well-being.

Philosophy is an all-encompassing discipline that embraces all facets of human life and deals with change and permanence. It is a self-reflective discipline that appeals mainly to the mind. If the mind is developed, problems about development automatically resolve. Development centers on the mind. National development should primarily be about intellectual and moral development. If the mind is cured of moral decadence, the problem of corruption and bad leadership becomes a farce. The critical approach to things which philosophy creates in man helps to acquire the right sense of value and right attitude to things. That is why in *The Republic*, Plato emphasized that unless philosophers are kings or kings are made philosophers, the ideal state cannot be attained. From this, we can deduce from Plato's assertion that philosophy is the means to achieving development in any state. The goal of all national development is not just about development plans, but the ability to improve, within the context of a growing economy, the lives of the citizens materially and morally.

5. How Philosophers have Influenced Development

Philosophy has an eminent task to fulfill in the quest and effort of nation building and human development. With its power of reflection, curiosity, criticality and objectivity, giving attention to details, clarification of concepts and rational explanation to accepting beliefs, philosophy cannot be divorced from nation building and human development. Through critical reflections, philosophy tries to determine an ethical and pragmatic guideline for effective realization and growth of human development. Philosophy is practically against dogmatism and approves justification by reason; it contributes in no small measure to the development of man and the amelioration of his suffering. It has also made huge contributions in ethics, applied ethics, and political philosophy. Down the millenniums and centuries, the works of great philosophers such as Confucius, Machiavelli, Leibniz, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Mill, Marx, and Rawls have played major roles in shaping and reshaping the socio-political, economic and historical realities of many nations and that of the world at large (Anonymous, 2004).

Dewey's work on the development of the American education system in the 20th century continues to have impact even in children's education. There is copious evidence that Clausewitz's ideas have exerted tremendous influence on international politics, international relations and 20th century military strategy, particularly, around the World War II. Logical and critical thinking have been both fundamental and essential in all areas of human inquiry and knowledge, notably mathematics, criminology, agriculture, psychology, linguistics, history, computer science and all sorts of engineering disciplines, just to mention these few. The importance of epistemology in providing us with sound criteria for acquiring knowledge cannot be overemphasized. Epistemology furnishes us with criteria of sound evidence and justified belief in justifying and ascertaining the validity of knowledge claims, and these criteria are also adopted for inquiry across all disciplines including law, psychology, economics and criminology.

Philosophy of Science monitors the work of scientists, keeping close watch on their methods and findings, and determining the nature of the entire range of scientific investigations and argumentations. A good example is the decades-long influence of B.F. Skinner's behaviorism on the strict empiricism of the American Psychological Association. Contemporary deep ecology and animal rights movement have become important forces within the field of Applied Ethics, raising critical questions about human impact on, and responsibility to, the natural environment. Aesthetics facilitates discussions in music, literature, and the arts. In all, philosophy pitches its tents with the various academic disciplines with the overarching aim of bringing about deeper understanding of the theoretical and conceptual underpinning of these fields.

Going down the memory lane, the philosophies of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle were discovered to have influenced the later Western culture, and their thought prompted our ideas of metaphysics, science, logic, and ethics. The pre-Socratic philosophers rejected dogmatism and sought rational explanation for natural phenomena. The success of pre-Socratic philosophy would not be measured by the truth, or otherwise of their answers to difficult questions of life, but in the fact that they brought the critical spirit and rationality to human inquiry. Socrates championed methodic dialectics. Plato rejected sense perception on the ground of its fleeting and changing character, and traced genuine knowledge (truth, beauty, and goodness) to changeless things in the world of forms. The best of life, for him, is attainable through contemplation and reflection about eternal truths. His philosophy about eternal things has great influence on Christian theology, particularly, immortality of the soul (life after death).

Aristotle's work catalysed, in the early days, the further development of natural science; and his metaphysical notion of "first cause" as the explanation of ultimate source of existence was a basic, invaluable tool in the hand of Mediaeval philosophers and theologians, such Thomas Aquinas. It is still relevant in 21st century Christian theology in arguing for the existence of God. Best life, for him, is obtained by virtuous activity, avoiding the two extremes and adopting the *golden mean* (moderation). For example, justice is the mean between inflicting the vice injustice on others and suffering it in the hands of others. He distinguishes between happiness and pleasure. For Stoicism and Epicureanism, best life is achievable only by contentment. They believe in fatalism, thus opined that the wise and the virtuous should accept and make the best of what cannot be changed. For them, pleasure should be pursued moderately. Skepticism challenged knowing anything for certain. Pyrrho claimed that we cannot know anything because our senses are incapable of providing reliable and accurate knowledge of the external world of reality. As such, the best thing to do is to permanently suspend all judgments and be apathetic to things around us.

Medieval Philosophy witnessed the era of Christian theology. St. Augustine's famous interpretation of human history, in his *City of God*, as a struggle in which the godly living in the city of God would ultimately prevail over the wicked dwelling in the city of the world, played a prominent role in the rejection of the pagan cults of ancient Rome and the widespread acceptance of Christianity, in the early Middle Ages. The Renaissance period in Europe is essentially characterised by intellectual reawakening and the revival of ancient Greek and Roman civilisations. Other notable occurrences in this period included advances in astronomy, physics and mathematics, as well as emphasis on science and humanism, which brought a positive influence on the aims and methods of philosophical inquiry, so that the millennium-long ties between philosophy and mediaeval theology were severed for good. With Francis Bacon's interest in the laws and processes of nature begun the inductive method of inquiry.

The rationalists (Rene Descartes, Baruch Spinoza, and Gottfried Leibniz) upheld the role of reason over experience in the attainment of knowledge about reality, submitting that the validity of sense perception rests squarely on more certain and indubitable principles. They also stressed the importance of mathematical procedures. Descartes, in particular, established analytic geometry and made a similar attempt to secure the foundation of the sciences, after securing the foundation of mathematics. All these are quite apart from his influence which helped start philosophy in its journey of securing the foundations of human knowledge through its commitment to epistemological problems. Also, Descartes' philosophy stimulated interest in the problem of the relationship of mind and matter. Spinoza devised a philosophical system built on geometry, rejecting the view of God as a superhuman creator of the universe. For him, the universe was God. He believed that people could live free and rational lives in a deterministic universe. Leibniz tried to provide a rational justification for the problem of evil and existence of God working independently of each other, Leibniz and Newton

developed the system of calculus. Leibniz's work in mathematics opened up the way for the development of symbolic logic, wherein mathematical principles are applied in solving logical problems.

Empiricist philosophers, on the other hand, emphasize the importance of experience and sense perception in the acquisition of knowledge. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), Locke explored the origin, extent and certainty of human knowledge, positing that there are no innate ideas—that is, ideas people are born with. Rather, the mind is a blank piece of paper (*tabula rasa*) at birth, on which different experiences of life register themselves as the individual grows. Experience is, to all intents and purposes, the source of all ideas and all knowledge. Berkeley's idealism proclaimed that "to be is to be perceived," implying that no object exists unless it is perceived by some mind. Hume extended the theories of Locke and Berkeley. He held that there are only impressions and ideas; that ideas come from impressions. He queried the notion of "cause and effect", rejecting the inductive claim that the future will be like the past.

Kant, whose philosophy is often referred as critical philosophy or transcendental philosophy, was stimulated by the skeptical stance of Hume. He provided what may be regarded as a synthesis of rationalism and empiricism. His *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) is a critical account of the powers and limits of reason, as source of human knowledge—a useful insight which would enable the determination of what is knowable and what is unknowable. In the end, Kant submitted that reason only furnishes us with apparent knowledge, never of things as they are in themselves. However, the mind is an active agent in the process of knowing, not a mere recorder of facts presented by the senses.

Roused by Kant's thought, Hegel established a theory of historical change called dialectic, in which there is conflict of opposites, leading to new unity of opposites. Hegel's ideas, were, in turn, later adopted for *dialectical materialism* by Marx, according to whom only material things are real. Arguing that there is an economic base on which all ideas are built, Marx theorized that the conflict between capitalists (the bourgeoisies) and industrial workers (the proletariat) would spell doom for capitalism and open the way for socialism, as an ultimate economic and political system. Friedrich Nietzsche, the atheistic philosopher, proclaimed in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1883-1885) that "God is dead," and called for the replacement of Christian morality (weak morality) with a strong morality that would produce supermen. The superman would develop a new kind of perfection and excellence, and realize the will to power through strength, rather than weakness.

Bentham and Mill were the grandfathers of utilitarianism—the greatest happiness principle—the view that greatest happiness for the greatest number of people is the test of right and wrong. In *The Subjection of Women* (1869), Mill proposed the revolutionary idea that the legal relegation of women be supplanted by "a principle of perfect equality." Sartre, in his existentialism, holds that choices and freedom rest with individuals, who create themselves in the process, because there are no objective standards to determine choice. Husserl, the phenomenologist, claims that the task of philosophy (phenomenology) is to describe phenomena—the objects of experience—accurately in such a way as to preclude all assumptions. This, for him, was the only way to arrive at true knowledge of reality.

Philosophy actually improves our ability to coordinate our actions in the light of all experiences hence it has great influence on how we live our lives. Every nation is built on philosophic ideas upon which the running of the nation revolves. Governmental institutions, religion, family, marriage, even education is established on certain philosophy. Philosophy shapes peoples' belief about truth and reality; the significance of life and how life should be ordered. The educational system of a society and the values and skills taught by it depends, to a large extent, on the society's philosophic ideas.

6. Conclusion

Two major problems have been identified as the bane to national development in Nigeria; corruption and bad leadership. To heal a nation of corruption and bad leadership, it is the mind-set of the people that needs to be re-oriented in the right direction. This is where philosophy is most useful and relevant. The philosophers' laboratory is the mind, and since the mind has been identified as the subject-matter of change, philosophy becomes imperative. Philosophy is a guiding principle to human behavior so it should maximally explore its philosophical tools such as the power of reflection, logic and critical thinking to re-orient the mind-set of the people against corruption and bad leadership, and thus reposition the societal values which are presently at the peak of decadence. If these are put in place, national development in Nigeria would have been put at its top gear. No doubt, to change and develop the society, the human mind plays a predominant role.

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