

PHILOSOPHY AND DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of philosophy within the context of Africa's development, with a view to showing that in spite of Africa's heterogeneous culture (Nigeria in particular), philosophy can play a critical role in their development in the 21st century. Philosophy represents a method of reflective, rational and constructive thinking, as well as a reasoned inquiry, while development designates the ability of a people to appropriate their total essence, in a total manner, as a people – a holistic vision in which they assume control of their own destiny. Attempts are made to articulate the concept of development and the essential roles of philosophy. These two will be examined critically to show how philosophy plays out regarding their interface. The paper employs the method of historical hermeneutics and textual analysis/exposition.

Keywords: *development, philosophy, culture, essence, critical literacy, revaluation of values, Africa*

Introduction

It is a truism that for any society to accurately appropriate its total essence and be in full control of its destiny. Such a society must have a balanced view of reality and development (Ojimba, 2015). This lends credence to the fact that reality is multi-faceted and development is multidimensional. Development designates the ability of a people to appropriate their total essence, in a total manner – a holistic vision in which they assume control of their own destiny. Similarly, Ake (1996) represents it as: “the process by which people create and

recreate themselves and their circumstances to realize higher levels of civilization in accordance with their choices and values.” As stated above, development is a multidimensional phenomenon and reality itself is multi-faceted. The earliest philosophers like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle recognized this truth about reality and this informed their enquiry into various aspects of reality. Aristotle, in his *Nichomachean Ethics*, tries to solve the question of values, and this fuelled his endeavour in morality. Unarguably, in trying to have a further and more balanced view of reality, Aristotle dwelt not only on the questions of morality and physics (physical phenomena) but also extended his enquiry beyond the physical phenomena. This forms the basis of his views in metaphysics (although Andronicus of Rhodes around 70BC played a vital role in this). This Aristotle’s view of research as extending beyond the confines of physics (the physical phenomena) is a pointer that to have a balanced view of reality and a comprehensive view of development, every aspect of life (physics, morality, aesthetics, history, metaphysics etc.) has to play a role.

Admittedly, Aristotle’s quest to extend research beyond the confines of the physical lends credence to the fact that for a people to have a comprehensive view of life, as well as full, meaningful and positive development, there is need to harness all fields of life (philosophy, geology, physics, economics, aesthetics, history, etc). Similarly, Plato, in trying to give the people of his time a good leadership and a comprehensive view of life, recommended training and education in certain areas of life. This, for him, would lead to the emergence of the philosopher king, who is well-knowledgeable in various fields of life and who would comfortably galvanize all the available resources for a positive leadership and meaningful development. Following the above, Plato and Aristotle recognized that for a comprehensive development to take place in any society, all aspects of reality (all fields of study) must be acknowledged. This makes it highly imperative to recognize the essential role of philosophy in the development questions of Africa. Until the recent past, every systematic pursuit of knowledge was regarded as philosophy before they started branching off, the last of them which was psychology (Nwala, 2011). This is why up till today, every Ph. D holder is regarded as a doctor of philosophy, which is an acknowledgement of the root of knowledge. Thus, the essential role of philosophy in building sound minds and developing a society of civilized individuals cannot be over-emphasized. This implies that the entire onus of development largely depends on philosophy.

Development is a buzz word, which has elicited assorted definitions. John Rawls conceives development from the perspective of improved justice (Rawls, 1972). This perspective of development displaces the focus of development discourse from the popular economic standpoint. The implication of Rawls’ view of development is that development cannot be

reduced to material needs and progress; it must be extended to human and social well-being. Thus, seen, development is conceived by Rawls within the context of self-realization. This captures exactly the role of philosophy in development. And, it is because philosophy offers the platform for any society or individual to determine or realize itself/himself. This finds practical application in the philosophic courage of Nelson Mandela of South Africa in fighting the apartheid regime in his country during his time.

Development is further viewed by Walter Rodney as economic and political self-reliance. Rodney posits that Africa's underdevelopment is traceable to the menace of colonialism, slavery and western imperialism (Rodney, 1972). Rodney's definition gives the impression that Africa would be developed if the people are freed from western imperialism and gain a reasonable level of economic and political stability, as well as self-reliance. However, this dream of self-reliance and stability will only materialize if the philosophical principles of sound-thinking and reasoning are imbibed. This is because a country can only develop if the citizens believe in themselves, carefully appropriate their essence and reason within themselves. Philosophy can comfortably furnish the individual and the society with the above capacities.

Some authors view development from the perspective of improved leadership. It was in this respect that Achebe posited that the cause of Nigeria's and, by extension, Africa's underdevelopment is the unwillingness of her leaders to be responsible and rise up to the challenge of personal examples, which are the hallmarks of leadership (Achebe, 1983). Achebe's comment reinforces Plato's position on leadership in *The Republic*: no country can develop meaningfully except philosophers become kings, or kings are led by divine providence to become philosophers (Plato, 1997). This further buttresses the important role of philosophy in the development questions of Africa. On the other hand, Friedrich Nietzsche gleaned development from the angle of robust and strong "will to power" (Nietzsche, 1967). According to him, a society or individual is categorized as "developed" if such individual or society harbors a strong and robust "will to power". This "will to power," for him, is a dynamic and dialectic principle, which is deeply-rooted in the process of endless becoming and interpretation (Nietzsche, 1967). This conception of development gives the impression of endless and continuous struggle. It implies that for a country to develop properly, such a country or society should not give up in its quest for continuous improvement. Philosophy, no doubt, can furnish a society with the virtues of perseverance and determination, which are the hallmarks of development.

In his book entitled *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger conceived development from the existential standpoint. For him, development is attained when attention is paid to how man

(Dasien) lives his day-to-day life (Heidegger, 1962). This also captures his view of existence as he maintains that it is only when being is allowed to manifest itself that we can understand being. Thus, Heidegger's view of development is captured in his phenomenological ontology, which states that "it is only as phenomenology is ontology possible." This simply implies that it is only when attention is paid to how man lives his daily life that we can understand man. The understanding of man translates to the understanding of the society. This is, because, it is only when we understand man and how he lives in the society that we can talk about a meaningful development. So, the understanding of man implies the understanding of the society; and a good and practical understanding of the society is the foundation of development. Admittedly, philosophy can help man understand and examine himself. This brings to mind the Socratic dictum that "an unexamined life is not worth living." Philosophy, no doubt, furnishes the individual with the principles and ability to understand himself and reality. It is when one has understood oneself and the society one lives in, that a meaningful development can take place.

From the foregoing, for any meaningful development to take place in any society, there is a need for critical intelligence and sound minds. Philosophy offers exactly this essential need. This is, because, philosophy can furnish the individual and society with critical intelligence, sound mind and courage to challenge pre-established orders and erroneous misconceptions about reality, which will usher in a meaningful and positive development. In the history of science, it was the critically and philosophically-minded Copernicus who, as a result of his philosophic courage, was able to challenge the erroneous astronomical views and misconceptions of reality during his time (Copernicus, 1543). Before Nicholas Copernicus, it was believed that the earth is the centre of the universe. And this was dogmatically accepted by those who claimed to be the custodians of knowledge then. However, the philosophically-minded Copernicus later turned this earth-centered view of the universe into a sun-centered view, but not without some difficulties. The point here is that a new way of seeing reality came into view as a result of this, which could be described as a positive development. This view is accepted even by the church today.

The above point buttresses the fact that for a people to develop comprehensively, there is a need for critical intelligence, sound and wise minds. Philosophy offers exactly this. In the contemporary African societies, where emphasis is on computer and technological inventions, it is important to realize that there are questions that the computer cannot answer. Similarly, what happened in Hiroshima cannot be forgotten in haste. This is only an indication that every society should recognize the essential role of philosophy, especially in harmonizing and humanizing scientific and technological inventions. If the moral questions of technological inventions were not neglected by the world, which only the philosopher

can provide answers to, the event at Hiroshima would not have taken place. Thus, for a meaningful and positive development to take place in any society, there is a need for a sound mind and critical intelligence to challenge erroneous pre-established orders, anachronistic values, etc. This lends credence to the importance of philosophy in the development of any society. And this why Omoregbe opined that it is a dangerous illusion to think that philosophy has no practical role to play in the development of a nation. Certainly, this is why Achebe emphasized that we need to know where the rain started beating us. African leaders cannot continue to ignore the important role of philosophy in the development of the continent. Against the backdrop of the negative tendency by African leaders to ignore the essential role of philosophy in the development questions of Africa, the paper argues that philosophy still remains the bedrock for a meaningful and positive development in Africa and in the 21st century despite our cultural and ethnic differences. To accomplish its major aim, the paper is divided into two key sections. In section one, the concepts of development and philosophy are articulated. Section two examines the essential roles of philosophy in the development of Africa. This section also embodies the conclusion.

Understanding Philosophy and Further Conceptualization of Development

The first line of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* has it that "all men by nature desire to know" (Aristotle, 1991). This offers an insight into what philosophy is all about, as the love of knowledge. Admittedly, this Aristotelian assertion presupposes that man, by nature, is curious to know. Thus, man is a *homo episteme* – a being of knowledge. This ties in with the etymological view of philosophy as the love of wisdom. Although, there is no unanimity in the definition of philosophy, the word, *philosophy*, is coined from two Greek words, *philos* and *sophia*, meaning *love* and *wisdom*, respectively. Therefore, philosophy, as hinted above, is the love of wisdom; and a philosopher is a lover of wisdom. So, it is a logical inquiry into the nature of reality. Similarly, Dewey views it as the critical reviewing of familiar things– an unceasing effort to discover the general truth that lies behind the particular facts. On the other hand, it is pertinent to further add to what has been captured in the literature review, in the introduction, regarding the concept of development.

The concept "development" within the purview of this paper, is understood from the perspective of "man's ability to appropriate his total essence in a total manner, as a whole man" –"a holistic vision in which man assumes control of his destiny" (Nakpodia, 2011. p.67). Similarly, Ake (1996) represents it as "the process by which people create and recreate themselves and their circumstances to realize higher levels of civilization in accordance with their choices and values" (p.25). In addition, Haaftan construes development as a qualitative change. This is why he defined development as "a process of more or less gradual change, resulting into what can be reconstructed as one or more

qualitatively different stages for which the prior stages are necessary conditions” (1997, p.18).

There is no gainsaying that philosophy has been the catalyst for the development of any nation. This is because every society requires critical minds and trained intelligence to chart the course of its past, present and future as well as harness the available resources for maximum development. Philosophy guides a nation in understanding itself and in acquiring a concrete outlook on life as well as its proximate and ultimate ends. It seeks to establish, for the nation, a scale of values for the conduct of its subjects. It stimulates the fullest power of man to think rationally and eliminate emotional and irrational approaches to situations and inculcate the habit of clear, exact, logical and critical thinking. To this extent, it cultivates sound minds in the society; and a developed society is nothing but a congregation of sound minds. Thus, it serves as a navigating life-compass for any nation and instills in its members the right attitude needed for development. This is why Alfred North Whitehead opines that “any nation that does not value trained (and critical) intelligence is doomed” (cited in Okafor, 2006, p. 230). The training and criticality, as emphasized by Whitehead, is an indirect emphasis on philosophic education. This is, because the wealth and power of a nation depend on the successful philosophic (critical and logical) education of its citizens and in the number of highly-talented men and women within the national compass a nation succeeds in providing with (superior philosophic) and divergent education (Okafor, 2006, p. 230). The essence of the above discourse is to project philosophy as a catalyst for development in Africa.

Philosophy and Development in Africa

Development has to do with qualitative and, sometimes, quantitative changes in the lives of individuals or groups. At the national level, there is an improvement in the general well-being of the people, while at the individual level, this manifests itself in form of “increased skill and capacity, self-discipline, greater freedom, responsibility and material well-being” (Rodney, 1972, p. 9). Philosophy represents a critical tool in the development and growth of any nation. Some people are of the view that philosophy, for instance, engages itself in abstract speculation and is, therefore, irrelevant to Africa’s development. However, it is our opinion in this paper that it is a grave mistake to entertain such thought. This is the reason why Omeregbe (2003) argues that “it is a dangerous illusion to think that philosophy has no effect in practical life” (p. 193). This paper is an attempt to counter such negative opinions about philosophy. It is also to project philosophy as the engine of development in Africa.

One of the factors required for the development of any nation is critical rationality. This requires the members of such society to examine their actions critically before taking decisions. The reason is that a developed nation is nothing but an aggregate of critical minds.

This informs the Socratic dictum that “an unexamined life is not worth living.” Philosophy instills in the individual, critical rationality and enables him to act accordingly. It enables the individual to do willingly what others would do because of the fear of the law. This brings to mind the Platonic maxim that “knowledge is virtue, while vice is ignorance” (cited in Cooper, 1997). Philosophy helps the individual develop and act in accordance with the right reason. Thus, the acquisition of philosophic knowledge in a given society will certainly enhance positive human knowledge in that society (Anichebe, 2005). This is also why Plato opines that either philosophers become kings or kings become philosophers if orderliness and discipline would prevail in a society.

The development of sound morals is a *sine qua non* for the growth of any nation. This is because any nation that is suffering from moral bankruptcy will never attain any meaningful development. Philosophy is a critical factor in the development of good morals in the society, which is an important aspect of development. And, there can be no meaningful development, if the members of the society are morally retrogressive. Immorality breeds corruption and irresponsibility, which constitute an obstacle to development (Anichebe, 2005). An unbridled corruption among the populace stampedes economic, political and, even, the social development of any nation. Consequently, only an ethical re-orientation, which philosophy offers, will restore sanity, self-discipline and orderliness in the society, as well as galvanize and mobilize the forces needed for a meaningful development in Africa.

For development to take place, there must be a unity of the self within the self. This implies that for a person to develop, for instance, there must be a critical as well as constructive self-understanding. This lends credence, once more, to the Socratic dictum that “an unexamined life is not worth living.” It emphasizes critical self-understanding. Arguably, the state is an extension of the self; and this is why Aristotle views it as “a giant person.” As an extension of the self, the state also needs a critical understanding of itself in order to institute meaningful national development. Philosophy is a very potent tool for self-understanding. This is why Ricoeur (n.d) is of the view that “philosophy is a form of critical pedagogy aiming to bring about a democratic economy, a just society and good life.” These factors are ingredients of development. Thus, philosophy provides the forum, not only for reflection on our tradition and history, but in determining who we are, and what our prospects for the future are. This is because the moment one understands who one is, one can extend such knowledge to the societal level and eventually create a wave of true national sentiment. Arguably, knowing oneself is estimated to be finding a sense of meaning, and understanding the reason for being (Suazo, n.d). But since the African has been influenced by western values, his ignorance about his reason for being makes him incapable of threshing out the good influences from the bad ones – something that can drive his nation to the desired

stability and integrated development. Philosophy represents the tool for self-understanding and direction as well as a solution out of this maze of confusion.

A strong philosophy education is very relevant in the development of a nation. This is because if values education at the elementary and secondary levels appears to be very functional, at the university or the tertiary level, it is expected not to be functional any more but speculative, meaning philosophical (Suazo, n.d). This is the reason why Lyotard (2003) states that “the teaching of philosophy is generally recognized to be the basis of all university activity” (p.8) He explains that “philosophy must restore unity to learning, which has been scattered into separate sciences in laboratories and in pre-university education; it can only achieve this in a language game that links the sciences together as moments in the becoming of spirit, which links them to a rational narration, or rather meta-narration” (Lyotard, 2003, p.261).

UNESCO understands the role of philosophy in national development and expresses its importance in the following words: “what is the teaching of philosophy if not the teaching of freedom and critical reasoning? Philosophy actually implies exercising freedom in and through reflection because it is a matter of making rational judgments and not just expressing opinions. It is a matter of not just of knowing, but of understanding the meaning and the principles of knowing; because it is a matter of developing a critical mind, rampart par excellence against all forms of doctrinaire passion” (UNESCO, 2007, p. ix). Thus, the programme of UNESCO in integrating philosophy in all levels of knowing, including primary and secondary schools, is worth considering.

The business of philosophy is ideas; and ideas are very necessary in understanding ourselves. This is why Adler refers to ideas as basic and indispensable in the understanding of our society as well as the world we live in. He expresses it as such:

Ideas, as we shall see presently, constitute the vocabulary of everyone's thought. Unlike the concepts of the special sciences, the words that name the great ideas are, all of them, words of ordinary everyday speech. They are not technical terms. They do not belong to the private jargon of a specialized branch of knowledge. Everyone uses them in ordinary conversation. But everyone does not understand them as well as they can be understood, nor has everyone pondered sufficiently the questions raised by each of the great ideas. To do that and to think one's way through to some resolution of the conflicting answers to these questions is to philosophize (Adler, 1981, p. 3-4).

In line with the above quotation, philosophy aims at the “logical clarification of thoughts...[and being] not a body of doctrine but an activity... [thus a work that] consists essentially of elucidations” (Wittgenstein, 2001, p. 30). This means that it is an eye-opener – “it does not result in ‘philosophical propositions’, rather, in the clarification of propositions. Without philosophy, thoughts are, as it were, cloudy and indistinct. It is, therefore, the task of philosophy to make them clear and to give them sharp boundaries” (Wittgenstein, 2001, p. 30). This is an indication of how philosophy can be relevant to us and in our development as a nation. Thus, the importance of philosophy in realizing our dream for a meaningful development in Africa cannot be overemphasized.

The speed of globalization and the advancement of technology have made a constant re-examination and reevaluation of our culture in relation to contemporary realities a philosophical imperative. Bearing in mind the dynamism and flexibility of culture, this re-examination will culminate in a synthesis of the past and present for a more humane and civilized culture. Admittedly, philosophy ‘serves to challenge a people’s view of themselves and their condition as a pre-condition for redefining who they are and what they can be’ (cited in Anichebe, 2005, p. 133). This presents the philosopher as a physician of the culture. Using his analytic, constructive and logical tools, the philosopher purifies the aspects of cultures that have become anachronistic, obsolete and out of touch with contemporary realities. For instance, before now, it was believed that sickle cell children were possessed by evil spirits (Ogbanje), who use them to torment their parents. Also, previously, when a king died, heads of human beings were buried with him, because it was believed that those human beings would continue to serve him in the grave. Philosophy challenges these pre-established values not as deeply-rooted in the nature of things, but human constructs. With this, philosophy fine-tunes the culture for positive development and this positive cultural development is a meaningful aspect of development in Africa.

One of the greatest problems of the world is the phenomenon of terrorism. In Africa, different terrorist groups have emerged with different political and religious undertones. In Nigeria, for instance, the mayhem meted out by Boko Haram to the Nigerian people is unprecedented. In the northern part of Nigeria, people can hardly sleep with their two eyes closed. Incessant slaughtering of people has become the order of the day. Most Nigerians, who lived freely in the north before this period, have run out, leaving their hard-earned property because of the fear of losing their lives. Some have been thrown into abject poverty because of this ugly phenomenon. And, there is no denial that no nation can fully develop and appropriate its total essence and destiny in a situation of fear, war and lack of freedom. This has been a clog in the wheel of development of Africa and, Nigeria, in particular. This is moral bankruptcy which is ravaging the country; and it is lack of respect for human

dignity. Philosophy, through one of its branches: ethics, can deliver us from this moral bankruptcy.

Sometime ago, some secondary school students (Chibok girls) were kidnapped in northern Nigeria. Recently, some girls were also abducted from Dapchi Girls Secondary School. One of the mothers of the girls, whose daughter was kidnapped confessed to AIT (Africa Independent Television) that she was tired of sending her children to school and even threatened to withdraw her son from school. No country would definitely develop in a situation like this, where leaders are not accountable to their subjects. This explains why Plato, once again, was selective of the kind of people to lead in any state. Plato recognizes the importance of philosophic training and education in piloting the affairs of the state. This is why he was convinced that no nation would freely develop and totally appropriate its destiny unless philosophers become kings (leaders) or kings (leaders) are led by divine providence to become philosophers. Plato's choice of leaders, as philosophers, has become imperative in today's Africa. Thus, for any leader to truly appreciate the essential ingredients of leadership, such a leader must undergo a thorough philosophic education and training. This is also why Friedrich Nietzsche recommends the superman (the philosopher), who is an embodiment of critical literacy, strength and wisdom (cited in Oluwagbemi-Jacob and Ojimba) to pilot the affairs of his time. That underscores the importance of philosophy in development in Africa.

It is a truism that before any meaningful development will take place in any nation, there must be a thorough overhauling and re-orientation of the mind. This is exactly what Africa needs at the moment and philosophy offers this essential service. To illustrate, the current ethnic rivalry witnessed in Africa and Nigeria, in particular, is a serious cause for concern. The mass burial that took place recently in Benue State of Nigeria only shows nothing but a country without any hope of a meaningful development. The massacre of Benue people by Fulani herdsmen depicts a country without a future. A situation where the life of a cow is equal to a human being is unacceptable. The average Fulani man and the average Benue man see themselves as cat and dog. They construe themselves as two parallel lines which can never meet. There is no need saying that no meaningful development can take place in a situation like this. All one needs is a robust dialogue, an ethical re-orientation and attitudinal change. Philosophy, no doubt, can offer all these essential services. This is because a developed society is nothing but an aggregate of sound minds and philosophy provides this forum for the training of sound, wise and civilized minds. This buttresses the critical role of philosophy in development, and African leaders should devote more resources to the expansion and development of philosophic training and education as no continent can do without philosophy.

Conclusion

This paper set out to examine the essential role of philosophy in the development of Africa with a view to establishing that, despite Africa's diverse ethnic and cultural differences, philosophy remains the bedrock of her development in the 21st century. To accomplish this task, the paper has articulated the concept of development as well as philosophy, exposed the essential ingredients of philosophy and its critical role in the development of Africa. It noted that it is high time African leaders stopped ignoring the critical roles philosophy can play in Africa's development. It is important that our leaders appreciate the essential role of philosophy in the development questions of Africa instead of putting all attention in technological and scientific inventions.

In contemporary African societies, where technological and scientific disciplines are heavily funded by leaders and governments and little or no attention is given to the fields of arts and humanities, it is important to know that there are questions which technology/computer cannot answer. If, for instance, one has technological inventions without critical and civilized minds to humanize those inventions, one runs the risk of abusing such inventions or getting consumed by them. This implies that for a country to fully develop and appropriate its total essence as a people and be in total control of its destiny, the essential and critical role of philosophy cannot be ignored. Admittedly, one of the factors required for the development of any nation is critical rationality. This requires the members of such society to examine critically their actions before taking decisions. The reason is that a developed nation is nothing but an aggregate of critical minds. Philosophy instills in the individual, critical rationality and enables him/her to act accordingly. It enables the individual to do willingly what others would do because of the fear of the law. This brings to mind the Platonic maxim that knowledge is virtue, while vice is the consequence of ignorance. Philosophy helps the individual develop and act in accordance with the right reason. Thus, the acquisition of philosophic knowledge, in a given society, will certainly enhance positive human knowledge in that society. In this connection, Plato asserted that unless philosophers become kings or kings become philosophers, orderliness and discipline will not prevail. Thus, from the discussion so far, African leaders and governments should realize that it is a dangerous illusion to think that philosophy has no role to play in the development of Africa. Institutions, parastatals and other government agencies should, therefore, make adequate funds available for the learning and acquisition of philosophic knowledge, even from primary schools, as the entire onus of Africa's development heavily depends on it.

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