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68th Inaugural Lecture

PHILOSOPHY IN AN AFRICAN CULTURE: A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS



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The Vice-Chancellor,
Deputy Vice-Chancellor,
Principal Officers of the University,
Provost of Post Graduate School,
Provosts of Colleges and Deans of Faculties,
Heads of Department and Directors of Units,
Members of the Academia,
Non-Teaching Colleagues,
All Royal Highnesses present,
Leaders of Religions and other Ministers of the Gospel,
Distinguished Guests and Friends from Sister Universities,
Gentlemen of the Press,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,
Great OOUITES!

Preamble

It is an honour and a pleasure for me, Mr. Vice Chancellor, standing before this audience today, to deliver an inaugural lecture as a formal initiation into the professorial circle. The making of today is neither by might nor power, but by the mercy of God. With the benefit of hindsight from neonatal to babyhood, childhood to adolescent-hood, adulthood to fatherhood, studentship to professorship, I am convinced, beyond all reasonable doubts that to God belongs the glory, for His grace in raising me from "grass to grace." Though reaching the summit has not been fortuitous because the road is strewn with bumps of challenges. I will forever give honour and adoration to God Almighty for crowning my efforts with success, thereby, making this feat possible.

Remarkably, I am delighted giving the 68th Inaugural Lecture of the Olabisi Onabanjo University, the 7th in the series from the Faculty of Arts and the 3rd from the Department of Philosophy. In keeping with the University tradition of Inaugural lectures, I shall profess before you my humble contributions to knowledge and society in general. This shall be done not by recounting all my research activities or social history and achievements, but by articulating how philosophy can serve as a pedestal for human civilization in an African culture.

This lecture is entitled: **Philosophy in an African Culture: A Light in the Darkness** The primary motivation for the choice of this title is because of the tribulations of the discipline of philosophy in Africa as well as the precarious conditions of African cultures. The question is: *can philosophy be a light that could take Africa out of its murkiness?* In particular, *can African philosophy brighten the darkness in African cultures in a comprehensible and realistic form?* I intend to address these questions in this inaugural lecture by showing how African philosophy and, by extension, philosophy in general, can be of immense significance in leading Africa out of the doldrums of darkness. This title owes its source to the biblical verse – “*And the Light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not*” (KJV; John 1:5), albeit with some modifications. Unlike the biblical understanding of non-comprehensiveness of how darkness diffuses at the presence of the light, African philosophy, serving as a pivot for occasioning lightness on the dark parts of African cultural life, is comprehensible and amenable to human epistemic understanding.

Before I delve into the discussion proper, may I take this opportunity to recognize the ingenuity and contributions of

those great philosophers who sowed the seed that culminated in what is now the Department of Philosophy, Olabisi Onabanjo University, which we nurture today. The foundation, structure and intellectual tradition laid down thirty-two years ago continue to blossom and flourish. My tribute first goes to those that are now late: Prof. Olubi Sodipo, a distinguished world-class philosopher and the foundation Vice-Chancellor of this University, late Prof. Peter Bodunrin, a former Vice-Chancellor of the then Ondo State University (Ekiti State University), Dr. Moses Oke, who ill-fatedly died by road accident early this year while travelling to a sister university to examine a PhD candidate and late Dr. Bedu-Addo. The living philosophical pathfinders of the Department whose roles cannot be hand-waved deserve some special mention: Prof. Segun Gbadegesin (now the Interim Dean, Howard University, USA); Dr. Dipo Fashina, the indefatigable ASUU veteran; Prof. Segun Ogungbemi, on whose recommendation I had the opportunity of joining the seasoned academic team in the Department twenty-three years ago, and Prof. Tunde Bewaji (now of the University of West Indies, Jamaica).

Tributes also to the living legends of the Department, whose commitments and purposeful leadership have been the driving force for the development of the Department: Prof. Ayodele Fadahunsi, who delivered the first inaugural lecture in the Department, followed by Prof. Samuel Ade Ali, both former Deans, Faculty of Arts, Dr. Ebun Oduwale, the Director, Centre for General Studies; Dr. S.O. Opafola, Dr. M.O. Onwuegbusi and all others in the academic team of the Department that make the “Ogun School of Philosophy.” Though not a homogenous school, the diverse theoretical traditions, training and specializations in the Department have continuously reinforced the strength of the Department among Departments of Philosophy in

Nigeria and Africa. Currently, the Department prides itself with the highest number of PhD holders not only in the Faculty of Arts but also in this University as a whole. The postgraduate programmes of the Department are effectively making inroads as many of our alumni, both at M.A and PhD levels, are assuming academic positions across institutions in the country. Many of the Department's graduates are excelling in various fields both within and outside the country. The systemic challenges notwithstanding, such impeccable records give some measure of satisfaction. I am immensely proud to be part of the high-flying Department of Philosophy team in this University.

INTRODUCTION

Does philosophy indeed provide stable resolutions to questions pertaining to the practical affairs of life? In what ways can philosophy be relevant to contemporary Africa, if at all, this claim of relevance is true? Is there a possibility of learning from our historical experiences through a revitalisation and consequent resuscitation of our tradition and indigenous cultural ideas in contemporary times? Can Africans change the vicissitudes of post-colonial era following a disruption of their culture by alien intrusion? To what extent can it be established that at the heart of our culture, there abound lurk philosophical insights worthy of further reflection in order to improve the conditions of human life on the continent? If so, in what ways can philosophy be a pedestal for making a reasoned enquiry into the dark sides of our culture in order to improve human well-being in Africa?

In consideration of the above fundamental questions, my philosophical engagement with African culture in this lecture is not to sympathetically urge a return to Africa's cultural values, practices, beliefs and institutions making up African culture, be it in the classical sense or the contemporary outlook. Nor do I intend to merely expose the precarious picture of Africa as well as her condition of human flourishing and leaving it at that. I intend doing more than this by interrogating the place and role of philosophy in African culture in a conscious attempt to provide charts for improving modes of human existence. Though without being oblivious of the philosophical attitude of asking more probing questions than providing answers, as well as the fact that philosophical investigations are about quest for pure understanding (Wiredu, 1980: x), I shall go beyond this general supposition

of the philosophical discourse in this lecture.

The presence of many excellent and skeptical minds, refined intellects, young and mature, men and women, in this intellectual and convivial gathering today makes my task gratifying with a keen awareness of the burden and importance of that task. For this reason, therefore, in examining African culture, I shall conceptually elucidate the most fundamental components of culture in general and African culture in particular. In furtherance of this task, I explore the interplay between thought and action in relation to how philosophy could existentially improve the African world and the human condition on the continent. In critically evaluating African culture, I aim at showing not only those aspects of our culture that are worthy of being preserved and fostered in contemporary times, but also attempt some intimations on how we can best appropriate relevant insights from foreign enculturation for contemporary African benefits. In view of the non-finality of answers to any fundamental problems in philosophy, my assessment and postulations on how African philosophy can contribute to positive social change and improved human condition in contemporary times in Africa may perhaps remain non-conjectural.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, before discussing your expectations from philosophy (and African philosophy in particular) and its connection with African culture, it is important for us to come to an understanding about the idea of African culture.

The Idea of African Culture

To start with, culture in a broad dimension essentially entails our general mode of making meaning out of existence and ways of living. This view is in consonance with the thinking of E.B. Taylor. Taylor (1872: 1) defines culture as a "*complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morality, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man or woman as a member of society.*" From this definition, we can say that African culture involves the ways we think and go about our daily lives, ranging from the material basis such as the mode of dressing, artistic expression, music, religion, artefacts, language, among others to the intellectual and ideological guidepost.

Over the years, the notion of "*African culture*" was beset with challenges, and there have been consequent debates on the uniqueness and authenticity of African culture, as well the fixative or the dynamic constituent of African culture. An offshoot of this debate led to the position that what we term today as "*African culture*" is vague, perhaps even unknown. This owes much to the conspicuous influences of both Western culture and the Asiatic colouration embedded in African culture. This may perhaps lead us into asking if there is anything unique about African culture and if it is knowable. *Is it the material aspects alone such as festivals, rituals, dress sense, eating habits, amongst others that strictly define our culture, or do we say that the distinctiveness of African culture lies in the immaterial aspects such as our traditional religion, language, belief systems and institutions?* In maintaining a positive answer to these posers, one is confronted with a more fundamental question which can be framed thus: *In what sense can we truly talk about a*

a unified African culture? In other words, would it be cogent to refer to 'African culture' as 'African cultures' given the reality of multi-ethnic configuration of the African geographical space as well as the difficulty in identifying that which is generally common to all sub-cultures in Africa?

In the light of the explications made by thinkers such as Kwame Nkrumah, Kwasi Wiredu, Ali Mazrui and others on the triple heritage thesis, the intimation of their thoughts is that much of what we tag as African culture cannot be properly regarded as indigenous to the continent due to the diffusion of cultures, which involves the forceful influences of Judeo-Christian and Islamic worldviews on the indigenous African cultural mind-sets. The postulations of the likes of Nkrumah, Mazrui, Wiredu and Kwame Appiah are to the effect that there is nothing so unique about African culture because of the presence of the overwhelming cultural flux.

The charge of these scholars which I quite consent to, is that in learning about ourselves we must learn about what we are not. African culture today is a mixed bag and it is within that mixed bag that African quest for development must be interrogated. The paradox that permeates contemporary African culture is that of swift alternation between darkness and light, of anarchy and order, of prosperity and poverty, of *"suffering and smiling"*, to use the phraseology of the late Afro-beat icon, Fela Anikulapo Kuti. Against this backdrop, we are left with the challenge of delineating what ways philosophy serves as a pedestal for making a reasoned enquiry into our cultural aspects with the final intent of improving the human condition on the African cultural space.

Philosophy, Culture and History: Any Interface?

Conceptual clarification of terms is important in order to arrive at an understanding of the relationship between philosophy and culture on the one hand, and philosophy and history on the other hand. Recall that an attempt has been made in explicating the term *"culture"*; however, there is the need to elaborate on our understanding of philosophy. This attempt is not as easy as it appears. The concept *'Philosophy'* is essentially such a contested discipline that it is intellectually embarrassing to admit that philosophers do not agree on what philosophy is. Defining philosophy is in itself a philosophical problem.

The word *'Philosophy'* undeniably has Greek origin, *philosophia* (love of wisdom); but the human activity it is used to denote is not exclusively Grecian. The love of wisdom and the pursuit of the same in multiple ways is not an exclusive property of a single human culture. It is ubiquitous in all cultures; the African context is not an exception (Balogun, 2011).

Philosophy, in Wiredu's thinking, is an attempt to understand the world (Wiredu, 1980: 51). He sees philosophical stimulation evolving and maturing as a result of human's encounter with life, the challenges of the society and the environment. Man, being a part of the constituents of the world has some principles, ideas and even assumptions underpinning his actions in the world and his interactions with his environment. Wiredu takes as axiomatic the need for human actions, whether at the level of individual or group, to be guided by ideas. Philosophy is the discipline concerned with the elucidation of the most fundamental of such ideas. He stoutly posits:

Philosophy seeks to be comprehensive and endeavours to transcend the ordinary levels of insight in both accuracy and depth. As a result it is complex and often technical in a tantalizing way, because it deals in uncommon ways with ideas which are the common stock of our ordinary thought and experience (Wiredu, 1980: 172).

Philosophers throughout history have been largely engaged in the above task of philosophy. This task as I highlighted in some of my works consists of deep systematic reflection, followed by clarification of concepts that are embedded in issues of life and rooted in various belief systems. An important tool of philosophy is systematic exposition with the critical attitude of probing questions (Balogun, 2008a: 170-184). It can be pointed out that the hallmark of philosophy is to protect us from the dangers of accepting beliefs without concrete evidence. It is on this showing that J.O. Sodipo (1973: 3) articulates philosophy to be a *“reflective and critical thinking about the concepts and principles which we use to organise our experience in moral, religion, in social and political life, in law, in history and the natural science”*. Given the subject-matter of philosophy as recognized in Sodipo’s view, one can say that philosophy involves an examination of the non-philosophical components of culture.

Philosophy as it is being used in the context of this lecture does not necessarily mean *‘the discipline of philosophy’* as it was imported from the West to African soil, but refers to the ability to think logically, raise vital questions in a consistent and coherent manner about a people’s belief system and as it was inherent in African nature even before they came in contact with the West.

Philosophy has a long history, especially in the West. However, the development of philosophy at various levels in history could not have occurred in isolation of events in the environments which have great influence on the cultural mainstay of various peoples and races. Just as history depends on the occurrences of events that make up such history, philosophy is not an exemption (Fadahunsi, 2002: 164). The early Greek philosophers were amazed at two things. First, they were struck by the diversity and unity in the universe. Second, they noticed that things were constantly changing; while at the same time there was a basic continuity in the midst of such changes. Many of their philosophical postulations are ratiocinative improvements on the mythological explanations given by the Ionian culture.

Plato’s idealism, for instance, cannot be properly appreciated if not properly understood within the contextual framework that led to its emergence. His idealistic metaphysics is rooted in the social expression of Greek society that unjustly condemned Socrates to death. Being his master, Plato could not comprehend how Socrates, whom he sees as an embodiment of virtues with unwavering leadership qualities, could be persecuted as such by the Grecian political authority. Therefore, it would be an act of inadequate evaluation to simply regard his metaphysics as an academic exercise, without seeing it in the light of the decadent political period of Greece. The point being made is that every philosophy is rooted in the problems philosophers attempt to resolve (Fadahunsi, 2002: 167).

During the Middle Age in history, another culture of practicing philosophy evolved:

The problems discussed throughout this period are the relation of faith to reason, the existence and simplicity of God, the purpose of theology and metaphysics, and the problems of knowledge of universals and of individuation (wikipedia.org)

The prevalent culture in medieval thoughts was the church with its religious institutional creeds and practices. Attempts were made in giving religious explanations to the nature of existence. This period also witnessed the epoch of empire, and the rise of the dichotomy between church and the state affairs. Philosophical thoughts and reflections during this period hovered around the predominant cultural indexes.

Enlightenment philosophical age, also known as the modern time in the history of philosophy was a direct reaction to both religious dogma and the confluence between faith and reason embedded in medieval culture. At this period in the history of philosophy, attempts were made to separate religious theses from reason. Francis Bacon, followed by David Hume and other notable scientific thinkers later proposed other ways of doing philosophy different from what was obtainable in medieval era. What was taken to be philosophy during the medieval period was seen as non-philosophical in the enlightenment age. Science, which takes the hub, assumes the focal point of philosophy. Developments in science consequently paved the way for industrial revolution and expansion of capitalism. The '*Vienna Circle*' of the logical positivists emerged when modern capitalism of the 20th Century was rearing its head in Europe with the unprecedented development in science and technology. Thus, the logical positivist thesis on verifiability principle as the criterion of meaningfulness was not devoid of reflections on the

prevailing intellectual, socio-cultural and economic conditions at the time.

The nature of philosophy is ever changing and in conformity to the nature of particular problems it attempts to solve (Fadahunsi, 2002: 166). As a further example of how the mood of any philosophic expression is culturally and socially conditioned, German idealism emerged out of a culture of a belief in ability of human mind to grasp absolute reality. Fredrick Hegel, the 19th Century German philosopher, writes:

Whatever happens, every individual is a child of his time; so philosophy too is its own time apprehended in thoughts. It is just as absurd to fancy that a philosophy can transcend its contemporary world as it is to fancy that an individual can overleap his own age, jump over Rhodes (Hegel, 1973: 11).

Further instances can be given of the nexus between focus of philosophical reflections and the history surrounding them. Existentialist philosophy is premised on the necessity of human responsibility over his choice. It is premised on a deep conviction that man is free. It needs be stressed that existentialism is a reactionary philosophy to ruins and penury of war. It grew out of Germany and France after the Second World War. Existentialist philosophers discouraged man's attitude of seeking for a supernatural being as the cause of his woe. Man, in existentialist lenses, is at the center and in charge of his destiny.

Existentialism was against the Roman doctrine of destiny and infallibility of an infinite force, as well as the scholastic emphasis on "*reason*", "*the absolute*" or "*mind*". All these

metaphysical doctrines failed to arouse the necessary inspiration and heighten enthusiasm when humanity was threatened by extinction (materially and spiritually) during the global hostility of the 1940s (Fadahunsi, 2002: 168). So, for the existentialists, humanity is best understood when his emotions, feelings, passions and other aspects of his irrational parts are studied in conjunction with the reasoning faculty. It is the contention of the existentialists that reason alone cannot grasp the indubitable truth needed for proper understanding of life, its meaning and self-actualization (Fadahunsi, 2002: 168).

Karl Popper (1980: 130) correctly notes that "genuine philosophical problems are always rooted in urgent problems outside philosophy and they die if these roots decay". Historical evidence abounds on the salience of Popper's observation. Consider, for instance, the political thoughts of Thomas Hobbes, Niccolo Machiavelli, and J.J. Rousseau among others which have all been a product of their social milieu and their consequent reactions to them. It is, however, debatable whether or not those philosophical thoughts die at the decay of the social upheaval that necessitated them, as Popper envisaged.

A slight modification of Popper's position is to say that all philosophies are epochal, having their source in time. Kolawole Ogundowole exemplifies this view when he remarks:

The emphasis made by each philosopher depends on the major problems prevalent at a given historical period of the development of mankind. That is why a good grasp of what philosophy is, demands that we approach and view philosophy epochally. Epochal comprehension of the essence of philosophy enables one to realize that

philosophies differ in content depending on the nature of problems tackled by the given philosopher at a given time and space; as well as the overall level of comprehensive awareness of the society and mankind in general and the ability to relate such special awareness to the development of philosophy (Ogundowole 2004:23).

The epoch of a given period dictates and defines the philosophical orientation of that historical epoch. Philosophical theories are not only socially conditioned but are historically influenced; philosophy is influenced by the exigencies of time and societies. Thus one could say that a philosophy is better understood when studied within its historical purview and limits.

But is there not likely to be a challenge to the above position in the light of the popular universal perennis understanding of philosophy? To affirm philosophy as a 'social-epochal expression' is to express the anti-thesis of the perennial nature of philosophy, that is, to say that there is no perennial philosophy. Philosophical problems are generally understood to be open-ended, perennial and not epoch limited. They are thought to be culturally neutral and universal. Pretensions to the universal *perennis* of philosophy notwithstanding, philosophical thoughts and reflections are not without contexts.

The notion of pure thought untainted by any influence of the real world should be understood to mean pure thought as the raw material for philosophizing. Philosophers do not always think in pure and untainted abstraction, though their language may be couched in abstract terms. Philosophy transcends pure thought because there exists

in some sense, a connection, no matter how loosely, between philosophy and society and its cultural practices. As Kwame Nkrumah (1970: 14) once noted, "*social milieu affects the content of philosophy, and the content of philosophy seeks to affect social milieu, either by confirming or opposing it.*" The point here is that philosophy develops from context, and no philosophy exists in a vacuum. This is verifiable in the philosophy of all cultures, epochs, and regions. Philosophy embeds in historical, epochal and cultural facts. Philosophers, according to Bertrand Russell (1946: 7), are "*both effects and causes: effects of the social circumstances and the politics and social institutions of their time, causes... of the beliefs, which mould the politics and institutions of later ages*".

The import of Russell's claim, like that of Nkrumah's, is that in the processes of structuring the scope of tasks for philosophers in our time, we should not lose sight of the socio-political exigencies of the moment. Nicolito Gianan (2009) provides an instructive analysis of the nature of the relationship between culture and philosophy. According to him:

Philosophy and culture are interdependent entities. The latter is said to be the cradle of the former; the former analyzes, refines, and appreciates the latter. Culture in this view needs to cultivate and nurture philosophy; and philosophy functions as an evaluator and studies culture in order to further develop and enrich it (Gianan, 2009: 118).

Construing culture as "*the ideas, customs, skills, arts, attitudes, sciences, modes of perception, and habits of thought and activity of a people or group, that are transferred or communicated, or passed along as in or to*

succeeding generations" (Gianan, 2009: 119), Gianan thinks that all philosophy is culturally shaped and socially determined. Without being oblivious of the dynamism of culture, Gianan opines further that "*no one can deny that most cultures have changed, and philosophizing also has evolved in the process. Philosophy has transformed itself into something that is already in dialogue with culture itself, not in opposition to or away from it*" (Gianan, 2009: 118).

It is plausible at this juncture, therefore, to assert that culture as a mode of existence is an aspect of man's existential experience and, as such, it requires some degree of ratiocination. In other words, philosophy provides intellectual and cognitive frameworks which may bring about *development through a refinement of our ways of thinking (culture)*. "*The function of philosophy everywhere is to examine the intellectual foundations of life, using the best available modes of knowledge and reflection for human well-being*" (Wiredu, 1980: 62). This assertion is Kwasi Wiredu's disposition towards the function of philosophy as an intellectual enterprise, and from this it can be averred that culture is subject to philosophical examination. Olusegun Oladipo (1999: 20) in consonance with this view states that:

Philosophy has a crucial role to play in the production, clarification and propagation of the ideas and values that guide a thought and life of a people. Philosophy serves to challenge a people's established views of themselves and their condition as a precondition for defining or re-defining who they are and what they can be (Oladipo, 1999: 20-21).

Granted the salience of Wiredu and Oladipo's assertions, however, the point is that the nexus between philosophy and culture is more important when considered in the light of how such interaction can lead to development.

Culture plays a very vital role in the conception of philosophy worldwide and vice versa. Philosophy does not subsist in a vacuum, just as culture does not subsist without philosophical reflections. In fact, with this foregoing realization, philosophy is truly embedded in a particular culture as well as cultures thriving upon philosophical reflections. I agree with Nicolito Gianan's position that:

Philosophy and culture are interdependent entities. The latter is said to be the cradle of the former; the former analyzes, refines, and appreciates the latter. Culture in this view needs to cultivate and nurture philosophy; and philosophy functions as an evaluator and studies culture in order to further develop and enrich it (Gianan, 2009: 118).

In consonance with Gianan, I doubt if any form of discourse, except apriori ones such as mathematical expressions, is independent of its cultural and social contexts. Philosophical thoughts are, therefore, influenced by such aspects of the lives of thinkers, identity and social relations as well as the culture that philosophers share in common with their audiences. Indeed, every philosophy is a philosophy of culture; culture and social milieu actually influence every philosophy. Every society has therefore evolved a philosophy through which her immediate socio-historic problems are reflected upon in search of answers.

On the strength of the foregoing explanations, should the case of Africa be an exception? While I think the answer to this poser is in the negative, permit me, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, to now turn to the idea of African philosophy as a precursor to discussing how a sustained engagement with the development of African Philosophy has resulted in illuminating aspects of Africa's cultural lives previously projected in Western thoughts as murky.

On African Philosophy

When we now talk of African philosophy, does it consist of anything significantly different from the above conception of philosophy? Again, my response is 'No'. To present a meaning and nature of African philosophy is as problematic as defining philosophy as an academic discipline. The reason is because of the varied conceptions of the discipline arising mainly from the different philosophical orientations on the debate surrounding the existence or non-existence of African philosophy. Gene Blocker (1987) is right when he notes that "*we cannot resolve the problem of defining African philosophy, until we first of all settle the meaning of 'African' and then the word, 'philosophy'*".

The term 'Africa' is a racial, geographical entity; it is a continent inhabited by people of diverse race, which are Black, White, Indian, Arabian, etc, definitely with common history but not necessarily the same culture and custom. Given this, it therefore becomes difficult to talk of African philosophy because of her diverse race and cultural traditions, languages and system of beliefs, but easier to talk about African philosophies (Azenabor, 2002: 7). In spite of the diversities of African cultures, there are common traits and similarities and that is why we can still

talk of African philosophy as an umbrella word covering African philosophies.

Just like there are such continental philosophies like the European philosophy, Chinese philosophy, there is equally a philosophy peculiar to the African continent. Such philosophy, whether articulated by either an indigenous or non- autochthonous African can be categorized as African philosophy in as much as its content is in harmony and congruence with the African experience and spirit. It is a distinct philosophy dealing with the various issues in metaphysical, epistemological, ethical, logical and cultural considerations within the African experiential interstice. It is on this note that Eneh Joseph correctly defines African philosophy as:

A critical reflection, analysis and synthesis of African cultural beliefs in reality. It is more centered on the religiosity of the people. African philosophy is homocentric, in the sense that it is man-centered. It is humanistic, dynamic, concrete and not abstract and static as the Western philosophy (Eneh 1999: 13-4).

While it is true that African philosophy is human centered as argued by Joseph Eneh, such nature of philosophy is not unique to African philosophy as he claimed; Western philosophy is as well not as abstract and static as Eneh depicts it. Indeed, African philosophy calls into question the different aspects of African traditional and contemporary life – religion, politics, social life, morality, economy, technology among other fundamental issues – by offering new interpretations and syntheses of African experiences.

On the above showing, without shuddering, it might be interesting to ponder on the extent to which philosophical insights lurk at the heart of our culture, especially, in relation to improving the conditions of human life on the continent. In other words, what is the human condition in contemporary Africa, and what role can philosophy play in arresting the situation?

The Human Condition in Contemporary Africa

In evaluating the human condition in Africa, I hesitate not to employ the Western indices of development especially in terms of the growth theorists' paradigm of the level of per capital income of an individual which is purely an economic index, as well as in terms of industrial and technological advancement and other material conditions which can also be added. These conceptions of human development are not without their difficulties. In relation to the African situation, there is a dismal condition of living in all spheres of social structure. This is marked by bad governance, injustice, social insecurity and political instability, poverty, ethnic and religious bigotry, lack of social infrastructures, porous educational system, and under-development of the human person. The reality on ground in many African states is the lack of basic infrastructure, poor roads and transportation facilities, lack of portable water, epileptic power supply, elitist housing scheme, derailing health and educational facilities, massive unemployment among others (Fayemi, 2006: 62). The human condition in Africa is that of a pitiable being whose existence in Hobbesian words is "*solitary, brutish, nasty and short*". Every step of existence is in crisis of avoidable and unnecessary risks. Compounding the situation is the failure of the state to perform the most elementary functions of governance.

The above gloomy situation offers philosophers an opportunity to contribute to the process of de-mystifying the forces and institutions that work together to perpetuate African underdevelopment thereby improving the human condition in Africa and consequently shaping Africa's future for the better. Some thinkers like Peter Bodunrin have stressed the importance of adopting Western process of modernisation aided by huge investment in science and technology for the purpose of development. The fact for Bodunrin (1992) remains that science and technology is the tool for achieving improved human condition in Africa. This line of thinking presupposes that African culture does not provide sufficient grounds for development. Paulin Hountondji also advocates that:

African culture in general, is before us, not behind us, and must be created today by a decisive action. Nobody would deny that this creation will not be effected *ex nihilo*, that it will necessarily embrace the heritage of the past and will therefore rather be a recreation. But this and simple withdrawal into the past are worlds apart (Hountondji, 1983: 53).

The human condition in Africa is laced with the challenges of underdevelopment in comparison with her Western counterpart. Even her Eastern counterpart has claimed to have left the pool of underdevelopment towards development. Lawrence Bamikole in a reaction to the foregoing predicament, expresses the opinion that technological advancement which some Western thinkers usually champion as the criterion for development is only an aspect and not the core of development (Bamikole, 2007: 26). When talking about the human condition in Africa, it is beyond a plague for scientific and technological

redemption. It is more of the demeaning of the quality attached to human life; life is not considered to be something meaningful and valuable. Life in Africa is characterized by deprivation, wants and existential threats, most especially, human made.

Philosophy in African Culture: Lighting the Darkness

Mr. Vice Chancellor, Sir, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, the title of this inaugural lecture, "**Philosophy in an African Culture: A Ray of Light in the Darkness**" underscores some suppositions. One is that "*the darkness*" does not imply that everything about African culture is suspect, shoddy, and unpleasant. Rather, its referent to African culture is to some questionable aspects of our cultural life. Euphemistically, philosophy, which is the light, is coming from within the dark-spotted aspects of African culture. Thus, the question is how an African oriented philosophy can be instrumental to addressing some of the critical problems in African culture. Just as the Yoruba proverbial saying – *inu ikoko dudu ni eko funfun ti n'jade* (The black pot produces the white corn meal), to what extent can we say that African philosophy is a source of light for the African tunnel? More specifically, is a philosophy rooted in an African culture a means to an improved human condition in contemporary times or an exercise in pure abstraction?

Mr. Vice Chancellor, Sir, in responding to these questions, permit me at this point to personally use this unique and rare opportunity to mention some of my modest contributions to the discipline of African philosophy. Since I joined the services of this great University in 1991 as a Graduate Assistant, I have always had the urge to research on the pragmatic import of philosophy in different spheres

of human existence. At inception of my career, my research interests were in philosophy of science, philosophy of law, philosophy of education and Epistemology. But given the rave of controversies that greeted African philosophy on the question of whether it exists or not in the early '90s, I was motivated to study African philosophy. However, the then meta-philosophical controversies were not my primary interest. Rather, I was interested in examining the epistemological conditions and justifications of some of the claims by some Western anthropologists such as Robin Horton on African modes of causal explanations and scientific reasoning. This I critically challenged in my PhD thesis entitled: "*A Comparative Study of Causality in Western Science and Traditional African Thought*" (Balogun 2004a).

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, developing my research interest in African philosophy to an area of specialization is informed by the need to interrogate forms and ways of life in Africa's cultural history in order to construct and reconstruct ideals of the practice of human well-being. The many dark-spots in African culture became a source of concern to me and I was strongly motivated into thinking about how philosophy might be an essential source of light upon the dark-sides of our culture. In other words, my research concern is to examine the foundations of life in Africa using critical reflections, and as Wiredu suggests, decolonizing African belief systems from alien accretions not for the mere purpose of defending the uniqueness of African identity, but for the overall self-conscious placement of African culture in a globalizing world. African philosophy considered as a reflection, articulation and reaction to the truths of our predilections and cultural realities holds the key to social transformation in Africa.

Conscious, therefore, of the need to use such philosophical tools to investigate the relevance of traditional African values, beliefs and ideas to contemporary African living in particular and the world in general, my work, first as an African philosopher, falls under three broad outlines. The first is my focus on meta-philosophical concerns and concepts of decolonization in African culture. In this direction I devoted energy on conceptual clarifications in African philosophy: causality, education, destiny, proverbial expressions, punishment, evil, the living-dead, law, medicine, gods and such theoretical entities as person, fatherhood, motherhood, truth, names, and morality. The supposition that African philosophy is essentially comparative in nature characterizes my second area of research which has to do with comparisons of conceptual constructs in an African philosophy (Yoruba) with latent ideas in Western philosophy. Bearing in mind that in spite of some commonalities, the continent of Africa is not a monolithic culture, my research in African philosophy has extensively dwelt on the Yoruba experience. The justification for this is not only to avoid the fallacy of composition, but also for the sake of linguistic competence in the Yoruba language.

My third engagement clusters around critical attention to the implications and relevance of some of these concepts, ideas and values in African traditions to enlightened ways of thinking in contemporary Africa with the humanistic goal of human well-being. Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, in the rest of this lecture, I aim to walk-through with this distinguished audience on the third part of my research vocation by addressing the dark shades in our culture and showing what philosophy has to offer in comprehending and brightening up African culture in its most enriching and profound ways.

One of the most fundamental questions that have confronted philosophers throughout the ages is the relevance of their theoretical vocation to societal problems in their social milieu. This question is raised more loudly now than, it seems, at any other previous period in Africa's modern history. Let us not pretend that the response to the question has always been positive. Peter Bodunrin (1990), for example, saw such questions presuming a demand for social utility on philosophy as misplaced. He said philosophy cannot contribute directly to social transformation because in its original essence in the West, philosophy is a purely theoretical enterprise. Moses Makinde's (1998) claims in his paper, "*Whither Philosophy in Africa?*" that African philosophy has not made any recognizable impact in Africa. He thus casts doubt on the social relevance of African philosophy.

Just like Bodunrin, Pieper tells us that philosophy is about watching, interpreting, and understanding the world and the people living in it. In a commercialized, profit-driven, goal-oriented society, philosophy just doesn't seem to make sense. According to him, "*whenever we look at being philosophically, we discuss purely 'theoretically' about it, in a manner, that is to say, untouched in any way whatsoever...by the desire to change it*" (Pieper, 1966: 116). Once the desire to change reality takes over, a change happens. At the moment of manipulation, the study stops being philosophy and becomes something else entirely - that is, science.

The point Pieper is making is that philosophy is focused on acquiring knowledge for the sake of knowing and that Philosophy should have no "*purpose*" in the practical or business sense, because philosophy by definition, is not

thinking towards a goal or thinking for a profit margin. Rather, it thinks simply for the sake of understanding. It is purely theoretical and unassuming. Ludwig Wittgenstein has remarked that philosophy "*leaves everything as it is*" (1968: 69). Accordingly, Bertrand Russell (1969), as well, grants that the value of philosophy should be "*sought largely in its very uncertainty*". The implication of this view is that philosophy is irrelevant not only to culture but also to society because where culture has elements of dynamism, philosophy is bogged down by unsettled issues, controversies, and unending disputes.

Contrary to the above positions, I however consider philosophy to be indispensably relevant not only to society, but also to meaningful human existence. The view that philosophy is purely theoretical without influence on practical or existential human existence is problematic because philosophers shape the society and indeed the future by changing people's beliefs and habits of thought, which in turn affect their actions. Accordingly, in Wiredu's (1998: 17) opinion, "*knowledge is necessary for action*". That is axiomatic. Action is necessary for survival. That too is axiomatic. Therefore, more certainly, [philosophical] knowledge is necessary for survival". Without philosophical consideration, life is without meaning.

Philosophy involves a rational inquiry into how we make meaning of existence in human culture. An enquiry into the validity of our culture is one many thematic philosophical topics that have in recent times captured and subsequently aroused a re-occurring interest and consequent myriad of theoretical reflections amongst philosophers. The impetus for this is that human development is ultimately entwined with how we make meaning out of existence.

Amongst African philosophers, an engagement in such polemics is not lacking. Philosophers in Africa in answer to the challenge of relevance have succeeded in creating a respectable genre of literature. Nwakaeze-Ogugua's conviction on the symbiosis between *philosophia-perrenis-theoria* and praxis is worth courting:

Philosophy is not and need not concern itself with only perennial and anachronistic issues in life, it should not engage in dead reflections on concepts and ideas, but should consider issues capable of affecting society positively (Nwakaeze-Ogugua, 2006: 154).

There are divergent orientations on whether or not philosophy could be of practical relevance to the African situation. Fundamentally, the critical question has been how the speculations of the philosophers can spill over the wall in meeting the yearnings and aspirations of the African world in the struggle for meaningful existence. Olusegun Oladipo thinks that the neglect of Africa's socio-cultural problems by African philosophers and their enormous concentration on the externally induced problem of skepticism about the existence of African philosophy has been responsible for the failure to create the conditions for the achievement of well-being and good living in Africa. Oladipo (1992: 7) argues:

The problem surrounding the idea of African philosophy is not that of fashioning an authentic philosophy, which will be true to African cultures and traditions. Nor is it the problem of the division between those who advocate a strong Western orientation in African philosophy and those who take a deviant route. It is not simply a conceptual problem having much to do with the meaning of cross-cultural concepts. Rather, the problem is that of

the extent to which African philosophers have been able to put their intellect in the service of the aspirations and struggles of African people.

The point of Oladipo's argument is that African philosophers have a practical mission in contemporary Africa, one that is socio-political in character—they are to be committed to fulfilling their scholarly obligations to their societies. For Oladipo (2006: 137), the human condition in Africa offers the philosophers an opportunity to contribute to the process of de-mystifying the forces and institutions that work together to stifle the African promise. However, the real situation we are faced with is the challenge of whether philosophy in an African culture can provide adequate support for an improvement of human conditions in contemporary times.

My philosophical scholarship shares in this concern by engaging, in concrete terms, in the explication of what philosophy can contribute to the flourishing of the human condition in Africa. Much like Muiyiwa Falaiye, I believe that philosophy must transcend the boundary of pure thought even though pure thought is its primary raw material (Falaiye, 2000: 3). The assumption here is that there exists some connection, no matter how loose, between philosophy and society and its cultural practices. As Kwame Nkrumah (1970: 14) once noted, "*social milieu affects the content of philosophy, and the content of philosophy seeks to affect social milieu, either by confirming or opposing it.*" The point here is that philosophy develops from context, and no philosophy exists in a vacuum. This is verifiable in the philosophy of all cultures, epochs, and regions, in spite of all pretensions to the idea of *philosophia perennis* and the notion of pure reason working untainted

by any influence of the real world.

In as much as the content and direction of every philosophy is historically and socially conditioned, philosophy in Africa should be resonantly guided by African social exigencies. Kwasi Wiredu remarks on the importance of philosophy in African culture. According to him,

Contemporary Africa is in the middle of the transition from a traditional to a modern society. This process of modernization entails changes not only in the physical environment but also in the mental outlook of our peoples, manifested both in their explicit beliefs and in their customs and their ordinary daily habits and pursuits. Since the fundamental rationale behind any changes in a world outlook is principally a philosophical matter, it is plain that the philosophical evaluation of our traditional thought is of very considerable relevance to the process of modernization on our continent (Wiredu, 1980: x).

The point of Wiredu above, which is quite cogent, is that Africa is currently undergoing a cultural transition, which requires the critical and constructive intervention of the philosopher. While Wiredu's thinking is more concentrated on getting Africa modernized and setting her on the trajectory of modernized societies, it is my view that in the African context, the problem of human development is more fundamental. This is particularly so because the modernization of African societies may not necessarily warrant a turnaround in the conditions and levels of human flourishing. As a harbinger of social change, philosophy envisions the dynamics and contradictions

involved in the course of socio-historical and cultural development. Culture, generally, is an indispensable pivot for genuine development. However, in the African cultural milieu, there are some unflattering aspects of our traditional culture which must be avoided in the quest towards development. Wiredu identifies anachronism, authoritarianism and supernaturalism as predominant elements in African culture that must be avoided in contemporary times. In consonance with Wiredu, I affirm that these are the defining dark shades in contemporary African culture.

Anachronism is failure to see archaic ideas and practices and the difficulty arising from modifying them as the case may require. It is about doing same thing in the same old ways. This, for the most part, is the dark side of African culture. There are many anachronistic ways and practices in contemporary Africa that refuse to pave way for new insights and the innovativeness of modernity. The persistence of such attitude constitutes an undernourishment of the potentials of human capacity development. Any human arrangement is authoritarian if it entails any person being made to do or suffer something against his will, or if it leads to any person being hindered in the development of his own will (Wiredu, 1980: 2).

In African cultures, instances abound on the unjustified overriding of an individual's will. Besides our social arrangement that harbours political authoritarianism, the institution of eldership, binding force of custom and ancestral paternalism also entails unquestioning obedience to superiors. The implication of situations such as these is that virtues of originality, independence of thought and initiatives necessary for human development are generally lacking in our culture.

Supernaturalism is the opposite of humanism involving not just the belief in supernatural beings, but essentially the basing of morality in some supernatural source (Wiredu, 1980: 5). In a situation such as this, as we find in most African cultures, human suffering and despicable human conditions are explicable with some sense of piety. However, when rules, policies and actions are based on people's appreciation of the conditions of human well-being, there is the tendency that the consequences will be in tandem with humane ideals and human welfare. Any policy designed strictly in conformity with the whims and caprices of the supernatural, or which purportedly refers to it as such is not likely to improve the human condition because of the supernatural lenses from which human sufferings and impoverishment are perceived.

My argument is that in the African context, philosophy (African philosophy inclusive) could contribute to the structural and qualitative change in African societies by systematically exposing fundamental issues of life rooted in our belief system. This exposition for further philosophical interpretation is to create a reconstructive pedestal for thoughts which are instrumental to societal development.

Wiredu highlights various cultural belief systems in Africa which, he thinks, should be jettisoned on the note of their being insignificant to development. Such belief systems are characterised by being anachronistic, authoritative and with special reverence for spiritual entities. Instances which he identifies are reverence for ancestors and other departed relatives who are believed to be able to affect the living, elaborate rituals of mourning, the belief in witchcraft and varieties of spirits, fetishes and powers and

the notion that humans are born into the world with an unalterable destiny bestowed in advance by God (Wiredu, 1980: 11). One may add amongst very many examples, the significance attached to female circumcision in African culture and the various mythologies attached to twins. While Wiredu's claims are questionable in some regard, our interest in the main is not to disprove the truth value of his assertions, an exercise which I have done elsewhere (Balogun, 2009a, 2009b, 2008a, 2008b, 2006a, 2006b, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c).

I believe that the duty of the philosopher, among others, is to theorize on how to reorder the political values and institutions of any society for the reconstruction of the present, and in pursuance of the betterment of the human condition. Since the theoretical is inevitably the archetype of the practical, African philosophers must conceptualize the ideal system of governance that can meet the yearnings and aspirations of Africans. Until our theoretical framework is strong, we cannot mobilize strategies toward the realization of goals. In order for Africa to launch itself into the path of freedom and development, philosophers must not shirk this theoretical obligation.

In the course of my career development, I attempted addressing this challenge in one of my works, *The Role of Olodumare and Divinities in the Democratization Process in Africa*, where I argued that there are some vital elements in the Yoruba African belief in *Olodumare* (God) and divinities that can be used to advance the democratization process in contemporary Africa. Although it follows a religious terrain, its philosophical underpinning makes it worth courting. My argument is that the signpost of democratic institutions and transformation such as mutual cooperation, harmonious interaction among arms of government, responsibility,

accessibility, trusteeship, consensus and mutual reconciliation are embedded in the traditional Yoruba (as well as in African traditional religion in general) belief in *Olodumare* and divinities.

The fact, however, is that these political values have not been allowed to affect and shape the contours of democratization in contemporary Africa. The consequence of this neglect of traditional belief in contemporary African politics is alarming: political authoritarianism, irregularity in political structures and institutions, social injustice and various forms of disorder all combine to stifle the democratization process in Africa. A resurgence of the practical relevance of the indigenous belief in *Olodumare* and divinities in traditional Yoruba thought could be a viable redemptive approach for understanding, regulating and sustaining the democratization process in 21st Century Africa.

A society's level of development is, among other things, a function of the quality of the ideologies by which it operates. For this reason, African philosophers should, as a point of duty, constantly review and reappraise the ideologies upon which their societies operate. Much success can be achieved if we constantly engage in dialogues with social scientists and other pertinent stakeholders and agencies, so as to enlarge and improve the quality and quantity of ideas produced to aid in the development of African society.

It is important to underscore Kwasi Wiredu's argument on the role of the African philosopher. Wiredu (1980: 52) writes:

He must let his voice be heard on the question of what mode of social and political organization is best suited to our conditions, and he must take active part: indeed, he must lead, in the re-appraisal of our traditional culture. Obviously, the two enterprises are inter-related, and in both he must reveal the basic principles on which to proceed.

Wiredu does not see African philosophers assuming a passive role in African social experience. Rather, he advocates for active participation. Perhaps in relation to such thinking, Segun Ogungbemi argues that the task of African philosophers should consist of matching theory with praxis. For him, African philosophers must rise to the challenge of participating not only in teaching and writing philosophy, but also in governance (Ogungbemi, 2000: 9). In other words, African philosophers need to rescue Africa from its impoverished and degrading state of human flourishing. I quite agree with Ogungbemi that it is not enough for us to speak out through our critiques and theorizing of social dilemma. Equally important, is our philosophers' active involvement in the emerging political order in Africa. Failure to honour this invitation will be of great disservice to the African people. However, I must warn that this call to action should not be misinterpreted to mean that all African philosophers should make their academic responsibilities of teaching, researching, and writing play second fiddle to politics.

It is the task of African philosophers to promote the discipline via their professional organizations namely, The Nigerian Philosophical Association (NPA), The Philosophical Association of Benin Republic (PABR), International Society for African Philosophy and Studies (ISAPS), The philosophical Association of Keya (PAK), etc. We can do this

by holding regular workshops, seminars, and press conferences where emerging issues that affect the African destiny are given philosophical appraisals. It is through this awareness that African philosophers can develop and sustain useful conversation with the African socio-cultural environment.

Africa has been troubled with incessant conflicts, ethnic hegemony, and tribal wars. As Gyekye clearly observes:

The ethnically plural character of African nation-state in the modern world has given rise to plurality of cultures that in turn have given rise to group loyalties. The evil caused by the pursuit of ethnic or communo-cultural loyalties are legion: in inter-ethnic (or better, intercultural) relations it has clouded the moral visions of members of the various communo-cultural groups (Gyekye, 1997: 255).

While there is no consensus on the exact causes and manifestations of this problem, it would be agreed that it requires urgent solutions if the continent is to record any meaningful progress. A. B. Ekanola has outlined the basic values required for meaningful and productive human existence. One of these values is peace. Questions relating to the meaning, conditions necessary and sufficient for attaining peace in society have been the concern of philosophers. Given this, Ekanola (2006: 53) says that philosophy can help in facilitating the realization of peace in society.

Peace is highly desirable, and African philosophers have played important roles in the restoration of peace in Africa. However, much more is still needed and expected, and that

is why the quest for peace should continue to constitute one of philosophers' central tasks in the twenty-first century. I made this point in my paper, "The Relevance of African Philosophy to Conflict Resolution in Africa" (Balogun, 2006c: 272-83). I argued there that there are ideas, values, and beliefs in traditional African cultural systems which, when systematically and thoroughly applied and promoted in contemporary Africa, can effectively aid conflict resolution.

Conflicts in Africa have degenerated into life-threatening culture of violence which has left an end product of death and destruction on the continent. Causes of armed conflicts in Africa include poor, corrupt and inept leadership, ethnic polarizing, religious bigotry, socio-economic problems, injustice and artificially established borders by the colonial masters through the geo-political deconstructions of the previously homogenous socio-cultural configurations of African states. There has been a very slow advance towards the alleviation of underlying economic and political conditions that foster tension and strife.

African philosophers can help resolve conflicts in Africa by creating room for rational reflection and by articulating how to develop appropriate criteria for distinguishing between the various interacting cultural elements and the values of our contemporary African heritage, with a view to selecting those criteria which are spiritually fulfilling and existentially beneficial to problem-solving in Africa. The use of values and beliefs like truth-telling, use of proverbs, the living-dead, and communalism can, when thoroughly applied and promoted in contemporary Africa, effectively aid conflict resolution. For the benefit of illustration, truth, known as *otito* in Yoruba culture, can be used as a tool of

conflict resolution because it creates life and promotes mutual understanding in the society. *Iro*, i.e. lie, is destructive and disintegrates conflict parties. Proverb, another cultural heritage, which is seen as refined wisdom can also aid conflict resolution as used by elders in resolving and conscientizing disagreeing parties in a conflict. By judiciously applying proverbs, the sage promotes the culture of dialogue and reconciles cords of misunderstanding in disputes. Proverbs are also used to encourage people to tolerate the sensibilities and nuances of other people, especially the opposing party. In the light of the above, African philosophers should see curbing the menace of violent conflicts in Africa as part of their intellectual task.

Philosophy can also contribute to African society in its contemporary mode of life through radical criticisms of cultural values. There are many aspects of traditional values that are anachronistic with some unhappy consequences for human flourishing in contemporary times. Such values should be jettisoned in contemporary times. There are as well positive aspects of African values that could be revitalized. To achieve this, philosophers can engage African cultural materials in rigorous analyses in order to reveal their implications and relevance for contemporary living. Indeed, a necessary condition for making a success of this task would require drawing from traditional ethical ideas with a view to determining their relevance to contemporary societies.

An ample example of this task is the idea of belief in the living-dead in traditional African society, which I discussed in a paper – *"In Defense of the Living Dead in Traditional Yoruba Thought."* The crux of my argument is that the belief in living-dead, despite various criticisms that have

been leveled against it, can be rationally defended and philosophically understood within the conceptual scheme of the traditional Yoruba (Balogun 2009b). The living-dead, collectively called "*oku-orun*" are believed by the traditional Yoruba to reside in the other world. In their eschatological existence, they are spiritual beings with greater authority. Though physically dead, spiritually, they continue to oversee the affairs of the living members of their families. This link and communion between the living and the dead has some philosophical lessons for contemporary African societies.

It serves as an impetus to the living and encourages them to be full of good works in order to get the favour of the living-dead, and to merit a good place in the other world. The belief marks the depth of the traditional Yoruba social, spiritual and moral awareness, as the living-dead help in the enforcement of morals through punishing the delinquent from the spiritual abode. The belief in the living-dead among the traditional Yoruba is worth courting because of its pragmatic essence. It contributes significantly to the meaningfulness of human social life by helping in sustaining the social bond, equilibrium and order in traditional societies. Although, the belief is almost moribund because of the undue influences of Western civilization and religion, I emphasized on the need to re-appraise our collective belief in the living-dead in the quest for transforming contemporary African states from their moral and social problems.

Philosophy can rescue contemporary African culture from its diminished of moral values by ethically engaging in the construction-and reconstruction-of new values. Three of such inter-related values are motherhood, fatherhood and education. Elsewhere, I have demonstrated this reconstructive exercise using the concepts of '*motherhood*' (Balogun, 2012) '*fatherhood*'

(Balogun, 2010) and the 'educated person' (Balogun, 2008c) in Yorùbá culture.

The powers of motherhood and fatherhood can make or mar the process of social reconstruction and human development of a given society. Motherhood and fatherhood, properly conceptualized in the authentic sense, constitute important foundational building cells upon which the super-structure of a society can be built. Regardless of whether a particular society displays a patrilineal or matrilineal kinship system, the importance of good mothering and fathering in the development and growth of the child cannot be over-stated. This is because they both provide physical, domestic, psychological, intellectual and emotional security for the wards against human development crisis.

The Yoruba notions of authentic motherhood and fatherhood, if systematically explored, portend some useful lessons not only for mothers and fathers in the contemporary world, but also for shaping the contours of social transformation in contemporary societies. The logical relation between authentic motherhood and fatherhood and improving the human condition is not loose, given the crucial roles and responsibilities of motherhood in the raising of children and nurturing them for a fruitful future life. Many of the causes of the problems of social degeneration and decay could be avoided if there are good fatherhood and motherhood in place to nurture, protect, and guide the child for moral goodness and positive greatness. Good motherhood and fatherhood produce politically balanced candidates of good leadership qualities in politics. In a state where there is a strong

consciousness towards authentic motherhood and fatherhood in nurturing leadership qualities of citizens, there is always a visible presence of political development. Economically, trained and well-nurtured children, give back to society's economic development. The more the number of these nurtured citizens, the better the economy of the state.

Now we turn to education. Let me pause a moment to provide a synoptic characterization of an understanding of education in traditional and contemporary African culture. The prevalent understanding of an educated person in contemporary Africa is that of a pure Western conception. In such conception, an educated person is often construed as having academic qualifications, as well as possessing some capacities such as prowess, technological compliance, among others. Marred in this conceptual distortion, emphasis in contemporary Africa has been on formal education at the expense of traditional African conception of education where emphasis is on the well-integrated personality with positive moral dispositions and a respecter of societal norms and interests. Traditionally, an educated person is economically prudent, socially and politically competent, morally acceptable and intellectually and culturally sophisticated (Balogun 2008c: 123).

The contemporary neglect of the African notion of an educated person has made literacy education a basis for the cultivation of abysmal ignorance, greed, individualistic acquisition, and all sorts of social vices. In view of our craze for formal education without due consideration for the ethical dimension, social vices have escalated at a rate of geometric progression. Thus, all eyes are on paper qualifications, without consideration for moral probity, intellectual creativity or problem solving capacity. The

resultant effects of these are obvious: examination malpractices, nepotism; mediocrity at the expense of meritocracy in public, private and corporate places, corruption, unemployment, and high crime wave with the long-run effects of all these anomalies leading to political instability, social disorder and stunted growth.

When viewed critically, if the idea of an educated person is to be taken to its logical conclusion, it would be of little or no surprise to say that only a few people in Africa can claim to be educated. Even persons of our seemingly "educated elites" who are on the corridors of power today are in the real sense of the word, uneducated, because if they were truly educated, they would be embodiments of well integrated personalities; they would not stoop to the mischief of pushing African nations into economic and political bondage through corrupt practices. In other words, as educated persons, they would generally be law abiding, patriotic, self-reliant, and morally ingrained. But that is not our current reality.

Thus, the absorption of only the Western model of education without ethical education appears to be a clog in the wheel of progress and development in contemporary Africa. An African understanding of an educated person is, perhaps, necessary especially at this point in our history. The praxis of education being a condition for social change and development can only cease to be a mirage in Africa, if the African connotation could be disseminated and made ingrained in our living consciousness. Such an African orientation will bring an attitudinal change that will aid our developmental drive. In fact, such an understanding will set African nations on the pace of catalyzing, sustaining and consolidating their developmental efforts in the 21st century. In having a society of which we can be more

proud of, governments, educational agencies and all other stakeholders in African states should see, as urgent, the need to fine-tune their educational philosophies and structures in line with this holistic conception of an educated person that integrates both the salient elements in the traditional conception and the progressive aspects of modern education.

From the foregoing, it follows to reason that Philosophy could therefore aid the development of the human condition in Africa by instilling clear and rational thinking not only on those that study it, but also on those who take delight in its subject matters. It trains men to think critically and constructively by giving informed insights into moral, aesthetic, and religious values in order to distinguish among values and to choose wisely.

Philosophy is equally a critique of ideology subsisting in the socio-cultural disposition of a people. Through this, philosophy contributes to the improvement of the human condition. An instance of how philosophy does this is attempted in my article, "African Leaders and Constitutional Immunity: The Moral Question" (Balogun, 2006b). I argued in this article that the 'immunity clause' in the constitutions of many African nations, is one of the banes bedeviling leadership on the African continent; it is logically, responsible for the denigration of the living conditions of most African. It is established that it is ethically wrong for African leaders to act and hide under the legality of constitutional immunity and demean African humanity through corrupt practices and bad leadership.

It is my contention that the solution lies not in repealing the immunity clause altogether but to have partial immunity that is limited to only civil matters and not

criminal offences. African states need an ethical overhaul of the immunity clause. This is a state where the law and ethical dictates are truly king over all. This I called 'qualified immunity'. By 'qualified immunity', I mean the enjoyment of immunity for civil proceedings only, and not covering criminal offences such as murder, embezzlement, money laundering and other corrupt practices. In addition to this legal framework, the ethical and cultural normative condition must be met in order to have purposeful leadership in 21st Century Africa. There are crucial qualities, which are expected in a leader in all societies. The cultural norms and values of a given society define what its legitimate standards for leadership are. Since moral uprightness and elements of good character are parts of the necessary criteria for electing leaders into political offices in African cultural set up, established and emergent African political leaders should not sacrifice these ethical prerequisites either in their quest for mounting political offices or on the altar of legal immunity while in office.

In traditional African culture, the parameter for deserved leadership role is constituted by the qualities of fairness, competence, transparency, fear of God, passion for selfless service, good and proven character, and wisdom. Given these cultural and normative requirements of leadership in traditional African societies, our contemporary world must learn a lesson from and take a cue from it. I contend that the immunity clause is a public privilege and honour bestowed on leadership by the people's constitution, and which must be reciprocated by upholding moral principles and the ethical norms of their societies.

Besides being a critique of negative ideology demonstrated above, the relevance of philosophy could be seen in some

other strata of social engineering. While philosophy does not aim directly at the acquisition of technical skills, it does, indeed, provide the intellectual background needed for success in economic transactions, political dealings and other social endeavours. No civilization can survive without a proper appreciation of the values which philosophy promotes, such as truth and realistic ideals. Men do not live by bread and tea, or by science and technologies alone; values and the comprehension of realities are cogent to meaningful human existence.

Claims have been made in many quarters that in order for the quality of human condition in Africa to be enhanced positively, the promotion of science and technology remains the ultimate destiny. Robin Horton (1997) for instance says that African philosophers have an important role to play in understanding and promoting science and technology in Africa if the lives of the citizenry are to be improved. Philosophers can moderate the process of adapting science for social needs by assisting "in the constant discussion of the optimal set of value judgments and cultural assumptions that social individuals must take the fullest advantage of, the sum of scientific knowledge available" (Keita, 1991: 146).

True to Keita's avowals, the extent of the rigor with which African philosophers pursue this task has great implications for the socio-economic transformation of Africa. The level of technological advancement and its quest in a society depends, to a reasonable extent, on the type of theoretical or ideological foundation prepared for it in that society. In relation to Africa, the quest for technological development should not only be theoretically entrenched in the sciences alone, but must also be complemented with the theoretical contributions from philosophy. This is because, as the interpreter of culture and life, the discipline of philosophy is

better suited to guide as well as provide the cultural and moral foundations for any meaningful technological development.

It is pertinent to mention that there exists a complementary relationship among philosophy, culture and the improvement of human condition through technology. The African predicament of underdevelopment and uncensored technological transfer should not be allowed to thwart this necessary relationship. Technology is a product of a people's culture; people's culture in turn is improved as a consequence of systematic philosophical reflections on issues and problems generated by their existential relationship with the environment. Philosophy is the fertile soil on which a true technological breakthrough in Africa should be based through rigorous ethical and epistemological considerations. In Africa's quest for technological development, the relevance of philosophy and philosophers must of necessity be recognized, explored and extolled (Balogun, 2007). The relegation or neglect of what philosophy has to offer will, undoubtedly, take meaning out of technology and endanger human life.

In the quest for making meaning out of our existence through scientific and technological improvements aimed at human welfare, the values embedded in the African culture require a reappraisal. From the foregoing polemics, I do not advocate an imitative philosophy, which relies solely on imports from other cultures and accepted without scrutiny. Likewise, it is not my opinion that there should be an extreme fervour for cultural revivalism or resuscitation. These positions can be inimical to the growth and development of the African quandary. My contention is that

while philosophy helps in providing critical tools for reconstruction, the cultural stimulation for our line of thought should be a reconstructive symbiosis of the beneficial aspects of cultures which are both endogenous and exogenous to Africa.

The importance of establishing a non-parasitic relationship between African culture and alien cultures is exemplified in my article "Medicinal Practice in Western Science and African Traditional Society: A Comparative Analysis" (2005d). The kind of symbiotic relationship established in this paper is between alternative and orthodox medicinal practice. I agree that both medicinal worldviews are essentially channelled towards healing, protecting, and making safe, the dignity of human life. In view of this common goal, we cannot therefore avoid the integration of traditional approach with modern approach, if better result is to be achieved.

My point in this regard is not to advocate methodological parasitism, where there is a clear-cut dichotomy between modern medicinal practice and that of traditional medicinal practice. Rather, I am of the conviction that traditional medicinal practice would do better when augmented and enriched with the kind of medicinal practices that obtain in Western science. This methodological enrichment should, however, not become a pollutant to the existing indigenous metaphysical systems which support alternative therapy and appeasement of spiritual beings in healing of sickness with supernatural causes. To facilitate and promote the existing indigenous healing systems, and thereby guide against loss of identity, there should be more intimate interaction between the traditional medicinal practitioners and the Western-oriented medical practitioners. In order to enhance indigenous medical and pharmaceutical practices

for our own benefit, some sort of scientification of traditional medicines is apposite.

I am highly in support of the view that the integration of alternative therapy with orthodox medicine will create a forum where medical practitioners will gain better insights on preventive, curative and palliative medicines through cross fertilization of ideas and discoveries from both practitioners. This would ultimately lead to improving the human condition through efficient health delivery system and, in effect, the continent's development. This follows from the maxim that health is wealth. However, the success of this integration is contingent on a strong commitment on the part of the government, philosophers, orthodox health practitioners and the traditional healers, to recognize, encourage and uphold the ideal of integration. This expected mutual interrelation, it must be stressed, does not purport the inferiority of African cultural values. Wiredu captures the essence of the preceding proposition of mutual borrowing and appropriation thus:

We in Africa at this historic juncture have to borrow, for example, technology – appropriate technology, let us add – from the West; but this cannot be interpreted as an admission that our culture is generally inferior to western culture (Wiredu, 1980: 60).

He also avers that no culture in the world is perfect and, to this effect, philosophy is a pedestal for making a reasoned enquiry into our cultural sensibilities. The possibility of improving the conditions of human life lies in the philosophical appraisal provided by African philosophers and stimulated by African cultural conditions. The beauty of such endeavour can be optimised only if positive cues

from both the material and immaterial aspects of different cultures are harnessed for the improvement of human conditions on the continent.

It is fundamental to note as Oladipo (2006: 143) rightly suggests that *“whatever question or issue of philosophical significance they (African philosophers) address, be it the question of the nature of the world and the purpose of human existence; or the issue of the nature and scope of human knowledge; or even the question of the nature of morality and the character of moral judgment, the African philosopher would need to face the challenge of re-appraising traditional conceptual schemes.”* This brings us to another challenge which ought to occupy part of the central focus of African philosophers in the 21st Century if philosophy is to lighten African culture. This challenge is that of conceptual decolonization.

Conceptual decolonization entails two inter-related ideas. One, it negatively involves the avoidance or reversal “through a critical conceptual self-awareness of the uncritical assimilation in African philosophy of those categories of thought embedded in foreign languages or philosophical traditions, which have exercised considerable influence on African life and thought” (Wiredu, 1995: 33). Second, it positively means exploring as much as judicious the resources of our own indigenous conceptual schemes in our philosophical meditations on even most technical the problems of contemporary philosophy” (Wiredu, 1995: 33). The task of conceptual decolonization has the benefit of promoting cross-cultural understanding in African philosophical studies. It is helpful in the search for African identity as it, among other things, promotes a better understanding of the intellectual foundations of African-culture. In view of the importance of conceptual

decolonization, African philosophers are enjoined to engage more seriously with the discourse of conceptual decolonization in their endeavours, with the hope of achieving the fundamental mission of placing Africa in the contemporary globalized world.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is evident that philosophy is indispensable in any attempt to better human conditions in contemporary Africa. In my philosophical scholarships, I have demonstrated this in different ways. The African philosopher, writes Ogunmodede (1993: 3), should have the interest of the people of Africa as his interest and concern, and should be able to advance their progress and development through his rigorous analysis of events, research, prognostications and publications. Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, my contributions to African philosophy have been in close commitment to this ideal of theory for praxis, in the hope of illuminating the dark contours of our cultural life. Many scholars of the same persuasion such as Falaye, Oladipo and Wiredu have equally identified ways by which philosophy interrogates culture for improving human existential conditions.

However, we are not yet at the point of *uhuru* in our intellectual engagements, as there are still more challenges ahead, which require continuous philosophical ruminations. As the African philosopher makes his or her contributions toward fashioning the intellectual foundations of a new Africa in the contemporary times, he or she must realize that the attendant responsibilities are distinctive and crucial. He or she should keep in mind the need to be a shining example of commitment to what is propagated. The philosopher must cooperate in preserving the best in African traditions without canonizing them and must contribute optimally to the transition to enlightened ways of thinking in contemporary Africa (Mason, 1982: 13).

In furthering the horizon of the relevance of philosophy in Africa to African cultural challenges, it is important to note

that the essence of philosophy, much as African philosophy, is to reflect, react and articulate how the truths of things stand with reference to our predilections and cultural realities. In as much as the content and direction of every philosophy is historically and socially conditioned, the task of African philosophers in contemporary times should be resonantly guided by African social exigencies, especially as defined by the questionable human condition in Africa. This, however, is not to strictly undermine the *philosophia perennis* character of philosophy.

Philosophy, by nature, is a reflective and conceptual analytical engagement with ideas. It is a cognitive enterprise concerned with pure abstraction and speculation. While this is true of philosophy, it is equally unassailable that both abstraction and speculation, which are ingrained in the nature of philosophy, are products of social realities. The philosophical speculations of Plato, Hobbes, Locke, Dewey, and other prominent philosophers are not without historical and cultural influences. Events in their various cultural environments influenced their philosophical abstractions and theories. In view of this, I submit that African philosophers should not jettison this crucial cultural nature of philosophy in their attempts to make philosophy relevant in Africa. While African philosophers explore the basic universal tools and principles of philosophy, they should be mindful of the need to use such tools and principles to investigate the relevance of traditional African values, beliefs, ideas and culture toward improving contemporary African lives in particular, and the world in general. This in itself is not sufficient; there is also the need to explore the relevant insights from foreign enculturation for contemporary African benefits. Doing so would enable us arrive at a new, holistic and

balanced state of human and cultural development, which is a common heritage of humankind.

Recommendations

Mr. Vice Chancellor, Sir, given that one of the basic essences of an inaugural lecture oeuvre is to serve "humanity in the unique way and with the special abilities which academics are endowed" (Irele 1982), let me, at this juncture, start my recommendation from our immediate university community. Part of the relegation of the intellectual power of philosophy is easily discernible in the near non-inclusion of philosophers in research ethics committee in the University. With the philosophical training in ethics, philosophers are competently relevant in the resolution of moral dilemmas arising in research issues. I, therefore, recommend an inclusion of philosopher(s) on such a vital committee.

At the level of the corporate world, the apparent disinterestedness of funding agencies in conceptual, reflective, normative or speculative researches which are common places in the Humanities should be overcome in order to realize, in the near future, the existential implications of researches in philosophy, especially as conducted in a multidisciplinary context.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, may I use this forum to reiterate a strong recommendation which I had made earlier elsewhere, on the inclusion of Philosophy in Nigerian Secondary School Curriculum (Balogun 2004b). As a discipline, philosophy is vital and highly indispensable to our daily operations as humans. The tradition in well-planned societies across the world is the early exposition of children to philosophy at the elementary levels. In experiencing the greater benefits of philosophy at individual

individual, state and continental levels, respectively, junior and secondary school students should be exposed to essential elements of Philosophy. The current situation in Nigeria, for example, where many universities in the North do not have philosophy as part of the university curriculum and courses is far beyond rationalization and should be urgently circumvented.

Besides being a pivot and springboard for clear and rational thinking, the teaching of philosophy at both elementary, secondary and university levels would equip pupils for greater challenges of life. I have developed, for instance, a proposal on curriculum restructuring at elementary and secondary schools in Nigeria to include the teaching of 'Philosophy for Children'. I hope, one day, it will see the light of the day. Permit me to conclude, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, that, today, I feel quite fulfilled in the expectation that we are all leaving this inaugural lecture with a new mind-set that appreciates the relevance of Philosophy as a pivotal lamp that will continue to brighten any murky cultural chamber of the African social formation.

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