

Philosophy in African Context: Improving the Human Condition

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ABSTRACT: Aim of this paper is to elucidate some of the most fundamental components of culture in general and African culture in particular. In furtherance, it also explores the interplay between thoughts and action in relation to how philosophy could existentially improve the African world in particular, and the human condition in general. Furthermore, the paper evaluates critically African culture with the aim of showing that some aspects of our culture are not only worthy of being preserved but can be fostered and embraced in contemporary times. Finally it recommends some practical steps on how we can best appropriate relevant insights from foreign enculturation for contemporary African benefit.

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, 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 our cultural aspects with the intent of improving the human condition in the African cultural space? In consideration of the above fundamental questions, this paper underscores the indispensable role of philosophy towards improving human conditions in Africa.

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My philosophical engagement with African culture in this paper is neither 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 the conscious attempt to provide charts for improving modes of human existence. Though without being oblivious of the fact that philosophical investigations in its pristine essence involves a quest for pure understanding (Wiredu, 1980: x), I shall go beyond this theoretical context in my discussion of African culture.

In examining African culture, I shall conceptually elucidate the most fundamental components of culture in general and African culture in particular. In furtherance, I explore the interplay between thought and action in relation to how philosophy could existentially improve the African world and the human condition in the continent. In critically evaluating African culture, I aim at showing that not only those aspects of our culture that are worthy of being preserved and fostered in contemporary times, but also attempts 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 philosophy can contribute to the triumph of social change and improved human condition in contemporary times in Africa remain conjectural.

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 my assertion stands 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." A corollary of the foregoing is that the African culture involves the ways we think and go about our daily lives, ranging from the material basis as mode of dressing, artistic expression, music, religion, artefacts, language, among others to its intellectual or ideological guidepost.

Over the years, the notion "African culture" is beset with challenges and consequent debate on the uniqueness or 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 even term today as "African culture" is vague, perhaps really 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 aspect alone such as festivals, rituals, dress sense, eating habits, amongst others that strictly defines our culture, or do we say that the distinctiveness of African culture lies in the immaterial aspect 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 of in what sense we can truly talk about a unified African culture. In other words, would it be cogent to refer '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 explications made by thinkers such as Kwame Nkrumah, Kwasi Wiredu, Alli Mazuri and others on the triple heritage thesis, the intimations 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 worldview on the indigenous African cultural mindsets. The postulate of the likes of Nkrumah, Mazuri, Wiredu and 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 interrogate. Against this backdrop, we are left with the challenge of delineating what ways philosophy serve as a pedestal for making a reasoned enquiry into our cultural aspects with the final intent of improving the human condition in the African cultural space.

The Interface between Philosophy and Culture

To arrive at a detailed establishment of the relationship between philosophy and culture, the need to make expositions on the terms is required. Recall that an attempt has been made in explicating the term "culture"; however, there is need to expose us to our understanding of philosophy. This attempt is not as easy as it appears. The concept philosophy is essentially a contested one such that it is intellectually embarrassing to open up that philosophers do not consensually agree on what philosophy is. This results in what I may call a philosophical problem. An attempted definition of philosophy therefore suffices.

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 under-

pinning 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 my previous write-up consist of firstly clarifying concepts that are embedded in issues of life and rooted in various belief systems. Second, another viable tool of philosophy is systematic exposition. The third tool is systematic reflection, while the fourth tool is critical reflection (Oladele, 2008a: 170-184). It can be pointed out that the hallmark of philosophy is to expose us to the dangers of accepting beliefs without concrete evidence. It is 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.

When we now talk of African philosophy, does it consist of anything significantly different from the above conception of philosophy? I think no. African philosophy can be seen as a rational and systematic inquiry into the fundamental problems confronting the African world, with a view to understanding and providing plausible solutions to them. It is an analytical, critical, and reconstructive evaluation of both traditional African cultural experience and modern cultural heritage, in pursuit of the goal of useful living for Africans. Its nature consists of clarifying concepts, puzzles, and problems that are embedded in issues of life and rooted in African belief systems. African philosophers expose and explain various beliefs, values, and ideas before they begin to analyse and interpret them in their philosophical investigations. In an attempt to do this, they subject all issues and objects of their investigations to systematic reflections. Consequent upon this is critical evaluation, which reflects the argumentative nature of the discipline. By its very nature, African philosophy thrives on mutual criticism in a culture of rational dialogue. It is an intellectual engagement with reconstruction of values, beliefs, and social norms supposedly held to be obsolete and absolute. African philosophy, in addition, compares various world-views for the purpose of cross-cultural understanding and perspective. Indeed, it is a cognitive discipline that examines

African experiences and calls into question the different aspects of African life – religion, politics, social life, morality, economy, technology, among other fundamental issues – by offering new interpretations and syntheses of African experiences.

It is plausible at this juncture therefore to put it forward that culture as mode of existence is an aspect of man's existential experience and as such, it requires 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 the thought and life of a people." He insists that "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's and Oladipo's assertion, the point however is that the nexus between philosophy and culture is more important when considered in the light of how such interaction can lead to development.

In my thinking, culture plays a very vital role in the conception of philosophy worldwide and vice versa. Philosophy does not subsist in a vacuum so as culture does not subsist without philosophical reflection on it. 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).

On the above showing, without shuddering, I ask, to what extent can it be established that at the heart of our culture, lurk philosophical insights worthy of further reflection in order to improve 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 capita* income which is purely an economic index, as well as in terms of industrial and technological indicators and other material conditions which can also be added. This conception of human development and condition is parochial. 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 of existence, 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 in order to improve the human condition in Africa and consequently shape Africa's future for the better. Some thinkers like Peter Bodunrin have stressed the importance of shaping 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 are the tools for achieving improved conditions for human life 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 under-development in comparison with her Western counterpart. Even her Eastern counterpart has claimed to have left the pool of underdevelopment towards development. Bamikole in a reaction to the foregoing predicament, unlike other thinkers 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 devel-

opment (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: From Theory to Praxis

How can philosophy be harnessed as a means to societal development? In what ways can the theoretical reflections of thinkers be merged with praxis such that they provide a viable option for social improvement? 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? These questions are fundamental and are raised more loudly now than, it seems, at any other previous period in Africa's modern history. However, questions about the social relevance of the discipline of philosophy are quite controversial. 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) claim in his paper, "Whither Philosophy in Africa?" that African philosophy has not made any recognizable impact in Africa 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. "Whenever we look at being philosophically, we discourse 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, but rather thinking 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) grants as well 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 think philosophy is 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. Following 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 interrogation 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-perennis-theoria* and *praxis* is worth courting with:

Philosophy is not and need not concern itself with only perennial and anachronistic issues in life, it not should 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 can be practically relevant 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 scepticism 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 peoples.

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. We are faced with the challenge of whether philosophy in an African culture can provide adequate support for an improvement of human conditions in contemporary times. If so, in what ways can philosophy be a pedestal for improving the human condition in African cultural space?

My philosophical scholarship shares in this concern by engaging in concrete terms in the explication of what philosophy can contribute to the flourishing of human condition in Africa. Much like Muyiwa Falaiye, I believe that philosophy must transcend the boundary of pure thought even though pure thought is a primary raw material (Falaiye, 2000: 3). One of the assumptions of the discourse is that there is some sense 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 (1980: x) 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.

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. Though while Wiredu's thinking is more concentrated on getting Africa modernized and setting her on the trajectory of modernized societies, I think that in the African context the problem of human development is more fundamental. This is particularly so because 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 developmental process. Culture, generally, is an indispensable pivot for genuine development. However, in the African cultural case, there is some essential pull down from our traditional culture, which must be avoided in the quest towards development. Wiredu identifies anachronism, authoritarianism and supernaturalism as predominant elements in an African culture that must be avoided in contemporary times.

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 the same thing in the same old ways. There are many anachronistic ways of practices in contemporary Africa that refuse to pave way for new insights and innovation. The persistence of such attitude constitutes an under nourishment of the potentials for 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/her own will (Wiredu, 1980: 2).

In African culture, 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 this is that virtues of originality, independence of thought and initiatives necessary for human development are ably 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 situations such as this, which our culture tends to be afflicted with, human suffering and despicable human conditions are explicable with some sense of piety. But when rules, policies and actions are based on people's appreciation of the conditions of human well-being, the consequences will tend to be in tandem with humane ideals and human welfare. Any policy emanating strictly in conformity with the whims and caprices of the supernatural or purportedly referred 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 systematically constructed argument is that in the African context, philosophy (African philosophy inclusive) can essentially 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 thought which are detrimental 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 anachro-

nistic, authoritative and with special reverence for spiritual entities. The instances he identifies are reverence for ancestors and other departed relatives who are believed to be able to affect the living, elaborate rituals of mourning, belief in witchcraft and varieties of spirits, fetishes and powers, 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 main interest here is not to disprove the truth value attached to his assertions as I have done that elsewhere (Balogun, 2009a, 2009b, 2008a, 2008b, 2006a, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c).

I believe that the duty of the philosopher, among other things, is to theorize on how to reorder the political values and institutions for the reconstruction of the present and in pursuance of bettering the human condition both in the present and future. 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.¹

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 dialogue 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. In illustrating the philosophical task in this regard, I have elsewhere examined the impoverishment of Africans through the political class who dominate and oppress the masses through the guise of constitutional immunity clause.

For us, 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,

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¹ I attempted meeting this duty in a paper titled "The Role of *Olodumare* and Divinities in Democratization Process in Africa," where I argue 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. Though this is a religious terrain, I believe its philosophical underpinning makes it worth courting.

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 governing (Ogungbemi, 2000: 9). In other words, African philosophers need to rescue Africa from its impoverished and degrading state in terms of human flourishing. I quite agree with Ogungbemi that it is not enough for us to speak out through our critiques and social theorizing. Rather, fundamentally important, too, is our 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 add now 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.

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 communocultural loyalties are legion: in inter-ethnic (or better, intercultural) relations it has clouded the moral visions of members of the various communocultural 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 identifies with 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) insists that philosophy can help in facilitating the realization of peace in society.

Peace is highly desirable, and African philosophers should 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. This point was made in my paper "The Relevance of African Philosophy to Conflict Resolution in Africa" (2006c: 272-83). I argued 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 in the resolution of conflicts. 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.

Philosophy can also contribute to African society in its contemporary mode of life through radical criticism 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 that can 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. Philosophy can rescue contemporary Africa from its diminishment of moral values by ethically engaging in the construction – and reconstruction – of new values. Elsewhere, I have demonstrated this reconstructive exercise using the concepts of ‘motherhood’ (Balogun, 2012) and ‘fatherhood’ (Balogun, 2010) 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 matrilineal kinship system, the importance of good mothering and fathering in the development and growth of the child cannot be overemphasized. 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 fruitful future life. Many of the causes of the problem of social deconstruction and decay can be avoided if there are good fatherhood and motherhood in place to nurture, protect, and guide the child for moral goodness and positive growth. Such 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 a visible presence of political development. Economically, the trained and nurtured children, which are products of them, give back to society's economic development. The more the number of these nurtured citizens, the better the economy of the state.

Philosophy can 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 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 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. For example, I consider that the 'immunity clause' in the Constitution of many African nations is one of the bane of the leadership crisis bedeviling the continent and logically responsible for the denigration of the conditions of living among the larger chunk of Africans. I do indeed consider 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.²

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. In order to have a purposive leadership in 21st Century Africa, the ethical and cultural normative condition must be met. 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 part of the necessary criteria considered before electing a leader into political offices in African cultural set up, African political leaders should not sacrifice these ethical prerequisites either in their quest of mounting political offices or on the altar of legal immunity while in office. In African traditional 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 are required. Given these cultural and normative requirements of leadership in traditional African societies, our contem-

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² Cf. my article "African Leaders and Constitutional Immunity: The Moral Question" (Balogun, 2006b).

porary world must learn a lesson from it and perhaps take a cue from it. I contend that immunity clause is a public privilege and honour bestowed on them 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, philosophy's relevance can be seen in some other strata of social engineering. Though, while philosophy does not aim directly at the acquisition of technical skills, it indeed provides the intellectual background helpful in succeeding in economic, 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, science and technologies alone; values and 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 positively enhanced, 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, 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 technology 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 it must be complemented with the theoretical contributions from philosophy. As a qualified interpreter of culture and life, Philosophy ought 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 of technology. 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 meaningfulness out of our existence through scientific and technological improvements aimed at human welfare, the values embedded in the African culture requires a reappraisal. From the foregoing polemics, I do not advocate an imitative philosophy, which relies solely on imports from other cultures that are 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 aids in providing critical tools for reconstruction, the cultural stimulation of 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 developed 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 practices. 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.

Our intention is not to advocate methodological parasitism, where there is a clear-cut dichotomy between modern medicinal practice and that of traditional medicinal practice. Rather, it is our conviction that traditional medicinal practice would do better when augmented and enriched with the kind of medicinal practices delivered by Western science. This methodological enrichment should, however, not become a pollutant of the existing native 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 to our own benefit, some sort of scientification of traditional medicine 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 pallia-

tive medicines through cross fertilization of ideas and discoveries from both forms of medical practice. This stands the benefit of 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, the philosophers, orthodox health practitioners and the traditional healers, to recognize, encourage and uphold the ideal of integration. However, this expected mutual interrelation does not purport the inferiority of African cultural values. Wiredu (1980: 60) captures the essence of the preceding proposition of mutual borrowing and appropriation in the following manner:

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.

He also attests that no culture in the world is perfect, and to this effect, philosophy is a pedestal for making a reasoned enquiry into our cultural aspects. 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 an improvement of human conditions on the continent.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is evident that philosophy is indispensable in any attempt to better human conditions in contemporary Africa. In my own philosophical scholarship, I have tried to demonstrate this in different ways. Many scholars of the same persuasion have equally identified ways by which philosophy interrogates culture for improving human existential conditions. However, we are not yet at the point of 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 functionality of philosophy in Africa, it is sacrosanct that the essence of philosophy such 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 conditions for human life in Africa.

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 abstraction and theories. In view of this, African philosophers should not jettison this crucial cultural nature of philosophy in their attempts to make philosophy relevant in Africa. In other words, while the African philosopher explores the basic universal tools and principles of philosophy, he or she 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 living in particular, as well as around the world. This in itself is not only sufficient; because there is also the need to explore the relevant insights from foreign enculturation for contemporary African benefits. Doing so would enable us to arrive at a new, holistic and balanced state of human and cultural development, which is a common humankind heritage.

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