

Metaphysics and Medical Practice: The Ontological Connection

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between metaphysics and medical practice by man; it adopted textual and expository analysis. The finding of the study revealed that there is a great relationship between metaphysics and medical practice in the area of the being of life and the ontological credentials of a human being, this cross-road is what forms the bedrock of medical practice in the world. Health workers especially medical practitioners make decisions on a daily basis in the performance of their duties. Therefore, it concluded that NUC should make the learning of metaphysics compulsory for medical practitioners.

Keywords: Metaphysics, Medical practice, Ontological, Knowledge, Dogmatism.

Introduction

The acquisition of knowledge comes from different forms either formal or informal. In whatever form knowledge is acquired is all for the benefit of man. Knowledge could be acquired purely for its own sake. That is, knowledge is acquired for knowledge sake without thought of its use or value¹. In another perspective, knowledge is acquired for its utilitarian value – its usefulness. On this score, knowledge is acquired to promote human needs and wellbeing.² In whichever way the acquisition of human

¹. Victor Inoka, "The Nature, Character and the Cognitive Status of Science" in S. I. Udoiem and Victor D. B. Inoka: *A Compendium on the History of Science* ed. with introduction, (Lagos: African Heritage Research and Publication, 2004), 8.

². Inoka, *a Compendium on the History of Science*, 8.

knowledge is seen, the ultimate need for knowledge acquisition must be traced to humans – that is knowledge both in its by-products and aim has relevance to humans.

Bearing this in mind, because of the purpose of the acquisition of knowledge by humans for the purpose of man, man had been able to introduce different disciplines for its purposes and benefits to make life meaningful and fulfilling. One of such discipline is medicine; medicine is discovered for the health needs of man. These different fields of learning though superficially look different but internally they are related and interwoven in nature/goal in its practices in some cases. That is why for any by-product to be achieved in knowledge breakthrough; a lot of disciplines or specialists must come together for any significant achievement in knowledge to be recorded. Most importantly, the goals of the disciplines, e.g. medical sciences, physical sciences, applied sciences, engineering, environmental sciences, humanities, social sciences, and so on are mainly for the benefit of humans.

However, not to lose track of our main discourse, philosophy which is the father of all disciplines/fields has a link/great relationship with medicine. Though it seems that since both of them applied different approaches or methods to solving problems, man sees unrelatedness in the two disciplines but objectively they are related. The area or discipline of philosophy that has link with medicine and medical practice is metaphysics; now we will turn our attention to metaphysics.

What is Metaphysics?

From the beginning of Western philosophy until the 18th century, metaphysics occupied a central part of philosophical enquiry. This gave metaphysics diverse definition of the subject matter and we will better not delve into it so as not to get derailed. For an appropriate definition of

metaphysics, the starting point ought to always be that of Aristotle's. Aristotle did not call this field of study metaphysics, but referred to it as the “*First Philosophy*”, which studies the most fundamental nature of reality. The name “Metaphysics” was given to it by Andronicus of Rhodes when he edited Aristotle's works, mainly because it came after the “Physics”.

To Aristotle, in metaphysics: There is a science which investigates beings as being and the attributes which belong to this in any of the so-called special sciences; for none of those other deal generally could being as they lay off being and investigate the attributes of the part – this is what mathematical sciences for instance do. Now science we are selling the first principles and the highest cause clearly there must be something if which these belong in virtue of its nature.³

From the foregoing, metaphysics according to Aristotle asks “What is being”? It seeks to find out the relationship between reality and our thoughts, the preconditions of all being and the governing principles, which affect all beings. Metaphysics is a universal enquiry because it “sets out the most general principles applying equally to all things”.⁴

Peter Simon in his opinion on the *First Philosophy* of Aristotle observes that metaphysics is the discipline that provides:

An outline inventory of the entities available when describing any subject of interest, whether it be the basic constituents of matter, the kinds of living organisms, the forms of political organization, the things investigated by mathematicians or worshipped by the devout.⁵

³. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. W. D. Ross, revised by J. Barnes, (1984, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press), 1003a, 24–28.

⁴. Peter Simons, “Criticism, Renewal and the Future of Metaphysics”, *Richmond Journal of Philosophy* (spring, 2004), 1.

⁵ Peter Simons, “Criticisms, Renewal and the Future of Metaphysics”, 1.

Thus metaphysics as the first philosophy is the basis of all other philosophical and scientific inquiry, and it oscillates between logic, “what there is” and “empirical science”⁶. It was indeed metaphysics as a discipline that evolved such vital topics in logic as the law of non contradiction and truth making, hence, it is the core of all rational activities be it natural sciences to logic, semantics and truth making⁷. In his arguments, the Dr. Tuomas E. Tahko posits that metaphysics is prior to logic⁸. This is in tune with the view of Aristotle in his *First Philosophy*, and I agree with Dr. Tahko.

Rom Harre in his book *The Philosophies of Science- an Introductory Survey* defines Metaphysics as “the study of the most general categories within which we think... the concepts to be used in understanding things and processes”,⁹ this definition is basically Aristotelian.

Metaphysics can also be defined as that branch of philosophy that pursues being qua being, examines what kinds of metaphysical constraints govern the different kinds of entities, how substance which flows from being qua being relates to entities through their essence as Aristotle observes, or through the related universal, genus or substratum. Essence Tahko points out, as investigated by metaphysics, okays what Aristotle says that it is what it is said be in virtue of itself, more so, it is only through the essence, that we can acquire further knowledge about reality. In short, metaphysics as the science of essences¹⁰ dwells on the level of the essence of entities rather than on the level of their observable

⁶ Tuomas Tahko, *The Necessity of Metaphysics*, 2008, downloaded from the internet as Tahko_PhD.pdf.

⁷ Tuomas Tahko, *the Necessity of Metaphysics*, 1.

⁸ Tuomas Tahko, *the Necessity of Metaphysics*, 14.

⁹ Rom Harre, *the Philosophy of Science: An Introductory Survey*, (1992, Oxford University Press), 100.

¹⁰ Tuomas Tahko, *the Necessity of Metaphysics*, 24.

features. Immanuel Kant on his part defined metaphysics as:

A wholly isolated speculative cognition of reason that elevates itself entirely above all instruction from experience, and though mere concepts (not like mathematics, though the application of concepts to intuition), where reason is supposed to be its own pupil - has up to now not been so favored by fate as to have been able to enter upon the secure course of a science been though older than all other sciences...¹¹

A brief analysis of Kant's definition reveals that Kant did not accept traditional metaphysics. For Kant, especially after Hume's devastating criticism of metaphysics, his sole preoccupation was to rescue metaphysics and to make it reach the secure course of a science. Kant did declare that he was negatively affected by the methodology adopted by dogmatic metaphysicians' like Wolff and Leibniz, and the over-optimistic view of the powers of a priori reasoning, and especially his preoccupation with absolute certainty of metaphysical knowledge.

At this juncture, we want to remind ourselves that metaphysical inquiry covers but not limited to an adventure and the theory of being, existence, matter, nothingness, cause and effect, time and dynamics, the good and the bad, identity, knowledge, cosmology, mind, language, words and possibility of knowledge, noumenon and phenomenon, creation, dimensions of mind, being and action, solipsism, free will, ethics and morals, intuition and mysticism, change and permanence meta-ethics, dreams and hypnosis, and perception and vision quest among others. From the foregoing, it's obvious that metaphysics studies virtually everything.

^{11.} Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by P. Guyer & A. W. Wood, (1998, Cambridge University Press), B.xiv.

Criticisms of Metaphysics

Metaphysics enjoyed unfettered approval from the ancients through the medieval to the early modern period when increase in knowledge spurred on by the successes in the scientific discoveries made many philosophers to begin raising questions about the methods and propositions of traditional philosophy the meaningfulness and certainty of metaphysical propositions.

David Hume was one of the foremost and leading critic metaphysics as elucidated in his book, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, in which he raised questions about the methods and propositions of traditional philosophy and especially cause and effect, and concluding that metaphysical propositions were meaningless and illusory. Hume began by asserting that: "Reason here seems to be thrown into a kind of amazement and suspense, which without the suggestion of any skeptic gives her diffidence of herself and of the ground on which she treads".¹²

Hume in the foregoing expresses his skepticism to knowledge derived from reason, holding that it is by far quite absurd, because out of that sort of amazement, reason cannot pronounce with certainty concerning any one object.

Hume goes down to assert that: "It seems to me, that the only objects of the abstract science or of demonstration are quantity and number, and that all attempts to extend this more perfect species of knowledge beyond these bounds are mere sophistry and illusion".¹³ Finally, in his effort to prove that the knowledge of casual principle and metaphysical realism is

^{12.} Amaechi Udefi, "Metaphysics and the Challenge of Logical Positivism: An Interrogation", *Journal of Social Science*, 21 (1); 7 – 11 (2009), 9.

^{13.} David Hume, *Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (La Salle, IL: Open Court), Pt II, Section 124. Downloaded from Internet- enquiry_ pdf.

unable to offer a plausible theory of truth, as direct correspondence is unsatisfactory. David Hume thus declared:

When we run over libraries, persuaded of these principles, what havoc must we make? If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance, does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it to the flames for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.¹⁴

This therefore implies that if we are to rely on Hume's postulations, metaphysical rational inquiring, except as directed to quantity and number are meaningless and illusory, which should be abandoned. The only known truths to Hume were either relations of ideas or matters of fact. With the dawn of the 20th century, new interests were developed in David Hume's criticisms of metaphysics, in the early 1920s when a group of philosophers, scientists, mathematicians, physicists, psychologists, etc, proclaimed themselves as the Vienna Circle by people like Moritz Schlick, Rudolf Carnap, Otto Neurath, Herbert Feigl, A. J. Ayer and others. Their disputations about metaphysics rested on the publication of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and A. J. Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic*. The Vienna Circle argued that the only genuine knowledge is those related to logic, mathematics, and the natural sciences. By this, they were deemed to tow the line of David Hume who earlier held that genuine knowledge is those that are susceptible to either "practical verification", or "verification in principle"¹⁵. However, the verification principle was short-lived because it could not clear the fact that the verification principle was itself susceptible to the same fault they used against metaphysics.

^{14.} David Hume, *Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, pt III, Section 131.

^{15.} David Hume, *Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section 132.

The foregoing onslaught against metaphysics rather than spell doom rather give rise to strenuous efforts to restore metaphysics as a form of rational inquiry, and as a means of explaining reality. One of earliest and by far the most successful was that of Immanuel Kant. Immanuel Kant says he was awakened from his dogmatic slumber of super-sensuous metaphysics¹⁶ by David Hume's criticism of metaphysics, and went straight for a radical reform or rather rebirth of metaphysics. In order to make metaphysics withstand skepticism, Kant decided to answer the question, "is metaphysics possible?" He thus declares:

Wearied therefore of dogmatism which teaches us nothing, and of skepticism, which does not even promise us anything, not even to rest in permitted ignorance, disquieted by the importance of knowledge so much needed; and lastly, rendered suspicious by long experience of all knowledge which we believe we possess or which offers itself under the title of pure reason - we have left but one critical question upon whose answer depends our future conduct, viz- 'is metaphysics at all possible?'¹⁷

Kant proceeds to answer how pure mathematics and natural science are possible before answering how metaphysics in general and as a pure science is possible. Kant calls Hume's Relations of ideas "Analytic apriori knowledge" and Hume's Matters of fact he calls "synthetic aposteriori knowledge"¹⁸. He stoutly rejected Hume's contention that our avenues to knowledge are exhausted by either going the route of empirical observation (Matters of fact) or going the route of logical

¹⁶ Michael N. Forster, "Kant and Skepticism", Part V, 13. Downloaded from the internet.

¹⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena from Any Future Metaphysics*, No. 4, IV: 274. Downloaded from the Internet as KantProl.

¹⁸ Berny Belvedere, "Did Kant Rescue Causality? An Overview of Kant's Response to Hume", *Filosof Journal*, fall, 2010, 16.

analysis (Relations of ideas), but – and here's the key-never can both routes be taken together¹⁹.

Kant's genius was in reconciling this difference as posited by Hume by showing metaphysical truths which includes the principle of causality can be both synthetic (empirical) and a priori (necessary) – this was the “meta scientific” with which to build and uphold a body of knowledge previously unavailable given Hume's demolition of it²⁰. Having resuscitated the principle of causality, Kant was able to put metaphysics on a sure footing perhaps for the first time in the history of metaphysics. The Kantian argument for the possibility of metaphysics also included his proving that “No Archimedean vantage point of pure description free of metaphysics was ever achieved” and also that “Wittgenstein himself had long abandoned any hope of a perspicuous correspondence between a neat logical language and a neat logical world”²¹.

So Kant reached the logical conclusion that by carefully examining and showing how certain meta-scientific notions are both useful and required in a wholistic investigation of the world, metaphysics is both possible and necessary. Kant concluded by declaring as cited by Foster that:

“Metaphysics... is the only science which promises... completion” and the critical philosophy can achieve a demonstrably “complete knowledge of reason itself and its pure thinking”.²²

¹⁹ Berny Belvedere, “Did Kant Rescue Causality? An Overview of Kant's Response to Hume”, 17.

²⁰ Berny Belvedere, “Did Kant Rescue Causality? An Overview of Kant's Response to Hume”, 18.

²¹ Peter Simons, “Criticisms, Renewal and the Future of Metaphysics”, 2.

²² Michael N. Forster, “Kant and Skepticism”, 30.

A lot of others also contributed in no small way to restoring metaphysics from the damning criticism of David Hume and worthy of note are philosophers like R. G. Collingwood, Merleau-Ponty, W. V. Quine, P. F. Strawson, Doug Lennat, and more recently, philosophers like Michael Dummett, Hilary Putnam, Eli Hirsch and Nelson Goodman. In the footsteps of Immanuel Kant, it is settled that metaphysics is possible as a science or as a rational enterprise. It cannot be abandoned, it cannot be thrown into the fire, and indeed, metaphysics is beneficial and extremely vital to the advancement of human knowledge in its entirety.

When we come to realize that there is no subject matter that is immune to the search light of metaphysical inquiry as the “ultimate stuff”, then we come to grips with the basic fact that metaphysics is an “extremely influential and important discipline”²³ and that it is relevant in all modes by which man acquires knowledge of reality. E. J. Lowe did not mince words when he declared: “in short, metaphysics itself is possible - indeed necessary- as a form of rational human inquiry because metaphysical possibility is an inescapable determinant of actuality”²⁴. That is to say that whether it is in language, politics, ethics, moral conduct, God and religion, history and change, social structure, existence and nothingness, truth and fallacy, or whatever that rational enterprise need be, they are inextricably linked to metaphysics. Without metaphysics, there is no gain saying the fact that what we would have would simply be only an endless space of possibilities from which it would be impossible to pick out the actual,²⁵ so it is from the basket of metaphysics that each discipline picks its assortment of details to its own.

²³ Tuomas Tahko, *the Necessity of Metaphysics*, 268.

²⁴ E. J. Lowe, *the Possibility of Metaphysics* (1998, Oxford Clarendon Press), 9.

²⁵ Tuomas Tahko, *the Necessity of Metaphysics*, 268.

Medicine: the Question of Origin

The field of medicine has different waves of origin. Some are of the view that the field originated in Africa precisely Egypt while to others it originated in Ancient Greece. For the proponents of the field originating in Egypt in Africa, they believed that the Egyptians formed the science of medicine; that the founder of Egyptian medicine, the first physician known in human history is Imhotep, a black Egyptian. Imhotep was the real founder of the field of medicine but not Hippocrates as generally agreed by the west. Imhotep flourished as the patron and father of medicine 2000 years before the Great Hippocrates today regarded as the father of medicine and whose oath doctors swear to before practicing.

Jerry Obi- Okogbuo has this to say:

If there is a field of knowledge which the Egyptians have a claim to have originated and advanced much more than their Mesopotamian contemporaries, it is the field of medicine; Indeed the Egyptians founded the science of medicine. The Egyptian mystery system produced not only philosophers and natural scientists but also medical doctors.²⁶

Obi- Okogbuo stating further says:

The founder of Egyptian medicine, the first physician known to history is Imhotep, a black Egyptian who flourished in the third dynasty for he was also vizier to King Zoser (3000 BC) and had his temple at Memphis where he taught. His knowledge of medicine was so immense that he was apotheosized and in later time accorded the status of a patron deity of medicine. He flourished more than 2000 years before the Great Hippocrates (C. 460 – C. 377 BC) today regarded as the father of medicine and whose oath doctors swear to before practicing, and the Greek god of healing is a descendant of the Egyptian deified Imhotep. In later times, people went to sleep in his temple and dream about him to get cured.²⁷

²⁶ Jerry Obi- Okogbuo, *Modern Science. Threshold and Philosophical Problems*, (Owerri: Hallmark Digital Image Services, 2015,) 58 – 59.

²⁷ Jerry Obi- Okogbuo, *Modern Science*, 59.

The record of ancient Egyptian medicine is contained in a number of medical texts or Papyri dated as far back as 2000 BC and contain materials of the time of Imhotep. But there is no Mesopotamian cuneiform medical text earlier than the seventh century BC. The Egyptian medical texts include the Ebers medical Papyrus (C. 1600 BC) and the Edwin Smith Papyrus (C. 1700), a copy of a text about two centuries earlier.²⁸

Egyptian medicine might have been rudimentary but the medical treatises shows that it had gone beyond folk medicine²⁹. The Edwin Smith Papyrus is not just like other Papyri, a collection of recipes and charms, but a systematic treatise. It contains forty-eight (48) cases, each case reported in the order; “name, examination, diagnosis, judgment, treatment, gloss”. The prescriptions are simple and cases are described and recorded as favorable, uncertain or unfavorable, and incurable³⁰. Much attention was given to the treatment of fractured bones so that the injured in war can quickly return to fighting. This shows that Egyptian doctors started recording empirical data earlier, a tradition which Hippocratic doctors were to follow³¹. Yet despite its remarkable distance from magic and superstition, the Papyrus still contains supernatural aids; example is case nine, which contains nearly no examination and no diagnosis, yet it contains the charm to be recited to effect cure.

Further, another pioneering contribution of Egypt to the field of medicine is contained in the Ebers medical Papyrus. The Ebers medical Papyrus contains recipe for fertility control, this consists of “a mixture of the tips of the shrub of Acacia and honey made into a tampon and inserted

²⁸ Jerry Obi- Okogbuo, *Modern Science*, 59.

²⁹ Jerry Obi- Okogbuo, *Modern Science*, 59.

³⁰ Jerry Obi- Okogbuo, *Modern Science*, 59.

³¹ Jerry Obi- Okogbuo, *Modern Science*, 59.

into the vagina as a suppository³². Through fermentation the Acacia breaks down into lactic acid, one of the active spermicidal agents used in contraceptive jellies today.³³

Another Egyptian medical treatise is the Carlsberg Papyrus 4, contains a case of the diagnosis of sterility in a woman, and this was copied verbatim by Hippocrates³⁴. According to this diagnosis, “insert a clove of garlic in the vagina for one night, if the odour comes out of her mouth, she will bear children³⁵. There is no Egyptian Papyrus on anatomy or physiology, yet they had the knowledge, this must have come from the practice of mummification³⁶. But in actual fact, the Egyptian knowledge of anatomy and physiology is largely acquired from animal not from human anatomy, this shows that there was little contact between embalmers and physicians. The Egyptians were also prone to trouble, but they had oculists to treat the ailment.

Besides, another vital area of medical practice in ancient Egypt was specialization. The idea of specialization in fields of study particularly in medicine was started by the Egyptians; each physician concerned himself with a particular disease³⁷, this became the model even today.

Herodotus visited Egypt and gave an eye-witness account thus:

— medicine is practiced among them in a plan of separation, each physician treats a single disorder and no more: thus the country swarms with medical practitioners, some undertaken to

³² Jerry Obi- Okogbuo, *Modern Science*, 59.

³³ Yosef Ben- Jochanman, *Black Man of the Nile*. (New York: Lawrence Hills Bks, 1991), 143 in I. C. Onyewuenyi, *African Origin of Greek Philosophy*, 52, 43.

³⁴ Jerry Obi- Okogbuo, *Modern Science*, 60.

³⁵ Diop Cheikh Anta, *Civilization or Barbarism*. (New York: Lawrence Hills Bks, 1991), 283 in I. C. Onyewuenyi, *African Origin of Greek Philosophy*, 52.

³⁶ Jerry Obi- Okogbuo, *Modern Science*, 60.

³⁷ Jerry Obi- Okogbuo, *Modern Science*, 60.

cure diseases of the eye, others of the head, others again of the teeth, others of the intestine, and some of those who are not local There are a set of men who practice the art of embalming and make it their proper business.³⁸

The Mesopotamians trail behind the Egyptians in the field of medicine, their medical text was not earlier than the seventh century BC and even at that it was filled with the “demon” theory of disease illness personified as an evil spirit that needed to be expelled from the sick by the physician through the use of emetics, purges or revolting medicament, magic and incantations³⁹. The Babylonian medical practice was astrological, so Greek medicine was largely derived from Egypt, but both Egyptian medicine and the astrological medicine of the Babylonians were both largely elaborate before they reached Christian Europe.

The Afro-centric view of the founding of the field of medicine is conferred by the Eurocentric view which had it that the field of medicine started in Athens Greece in Europe. This school of thought states that the pioneers of the field of medicine were Empedocles and Alemeon. For Empedocles, he is remembered in history because of his contribution that blood flows to and from the heart, and that the pores of the skin supplement the work of the respiratory passages in breathing. And to Alemeon, he introduced the practice of dissecting animal bodies, discovered the optic nerve and the Eustachian tube of the ear. He also discovered that the brain is the centre of the Nervous system. But today, Hippocrates of Cos is believed to be the father of medicine because he improved the practice of surgery, and he brought by the comparison of symptoms in diseases. This comparison of symptoms in diseases laid the foundation for clinical medicine that is why Hippocrates was seen as the

³⁸ Herodotus, *Histories II*, 108 in I. C. Onyewuenyi. *African Origin of Greek Philosophy*, 51 – 52.

³⁹ Jerry Obi- Okogbuo, *Modern Science*, 60.

founder of medicine. And a new practitioner of medicine must swear to the Hippocratic Oath administered to the new inducted medical doctors. However, it was believed that the Eurocentric conception for the founding of the medical practice originated from the Greek god of healing or medicine called Asclepius, the Greek's concept of medicine grew out of the worship of the Greek god of healing or medicine called Asclepius. Asclepius is the Greek god of healing and medicine which is symbolic with the snake as shown in the logo of the medical doctors. It is conceived that whenever someone is ill, he prays and sacrifices to Asclepius and the person will get cure of the illness. Keith A. Pearson and Duncan Large while writing on *The Gay of Science* by Nietzsche says: "Asclepius was the god of healing or medicine and in Athenian custom, people would make a sacrifice to him in hope of a cure".⁴⁰

That apart, despite either the Afro-centric view or Eurocentric view of the origin of medicine, the field of medicine among others has the following areas of specializations:

- Allergy and Immunology
- Anesthesiology
- Colon and Rectal Surgery
- Dermatology
- Internal Medicine
- Neurology – Neurological Surgery
- Nuclear Medicine
- Obstetrics / Gynecology
- Ophthalmology
- Orthopedic Surgery
- Otolaryngology
- Pathology

⁴⁰ Keith Ansell Pearson and Duncan Large, ed. *The Nietzsche Reader*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006), 236.

- Pediatrics
- Physical Medicine
- Plastic Surgery
- Preventive Medicine
- Psychiatry / Neurology
- Radiology
- Surgery
- Cardiology / Thoracic Surgery
- Urology

Other related areas are:

- Dentistry
- Osteopathy
- Psychology

Medicine is perhaps the first science to become independent of philosophy; it is concerned with the prevention and treatment of diseases and the preservation of life⁴¹. Medicine cannot be divided into pure and applied because each special branch of medicine includes treatment as well as a constant research⁴². We can now turn our attention to the main crux of the topic which is Metaphysics and Medical Practice: the Ontological Connection.

Metaphysics and Medical Practice: The Ontological Connection

The branches of philosophy that are most relevant to medical practice are metaphysics and ethics, but our concern is in the area of metaphysics. The basic concern of medicine is to address the health concerns of human

⁴¹ Jerry Obi- Okogbuo, *Modern Science*, 41.

⁴² Jerry Obi- Okogbuo, *Modern Science*, 41.

beings⁴³; it is therefore paramount that medical personnel and health workers understand the meaning of life and the ontological credentials of a human being. This understanding is often called into use in the decisions and choices that health workers especially doctors, make on a daily basis in the performance of their duties.

As John Harris rightly opined:

Health care is one of the clearest and most visible expressions of a society's attitude to the value of life. It is moreover one of the most important dimensions of the way in which we as individuals and as members of society demonstrate the value that we place on one another's lives and display the respect that we believe we owe to each other. We do this in a number of ways; firstly, by the extent to which we show ourselves prepared to save the lives of others if we can and by the extent we show ourselves prepared to pay the costs of so doing. Secondly, by the in which we sometimes select among the others whom we are prepared to save, or whom we judge worth living.⁴⁴

What comes to mind, is the question of what is the value of life begs another fundamental question namely; what sorts of lives have value, and what gives life the value we attach to it? When does human life begin? Is the human egg valuable at the point of conception? Does it have a value comparable to that of a mature adult? Is it morally permissible to save the life of 35-year-old and not that of the 90-year-old when it is impossible to save both lives? Should a doctor who is convinced that a patient has a terminal illness (a hopeless case) be allowed to discontinue treatment and concentrate on hopeful cases? If the same drugs that are used for

⁴³ Nbeta AlubaBari Desmond, "Philosophy: Subject Matter to Life and Other Disciplines" in AlubaBari Desmond Nbeta and Maraizu Elechi ed. *Readings in Philosophy and Logic: A Contemporary Introduction*, (Port Harcourt: Unique Printing and Publications, 2014), 38.

⁴⁴ John Harris, 1.

prolonging the life of the terminally ill person are also required to save the life of another and if the drugs are in short supply would it make sense not to “waste” it on the terminally ill person? In that case, the doctor judges one category of life more valuable than the other.⁴⁵

Ordinarily, we may say that it is proper for anyone including doctors to respect others. But do we realize that there are situations in which respecting someone will conflict with valuing the person's life? For example, people are apt to develop preferences for things and decide to choose things which will manifestly imperil their lives. In such a case, should the doctor choose to sacrifice value on the altar of respect? This tension between respects for another/others has also given rise to many other dilemmas in medical ethics; for instance, the issue of confidentiality. Medical ethicists raise an attempt to answer the questions of confidentiality and many more that arise in medical practice, e.g. euthanasia, abortion, embryonic experimentation, surrogate motherhood etc. Interrogatory medical practices are all philosophical inquiry that deals with life and the value of life. The main crux of medical practice is all about life, and saving life as well as valuing life as sacred; that life is to be maintained and protected by medical practice by all medical and allied disciplines.

Metaphysically, life is the main bedrock of all its inquiries. Life as a concept is a metaphysical concept that is wholly in the area of metaphysics by extension philosophy, no wonder that medicine is one of the grandchildren of philosophy and it gained independence to have its own field of study and its areas of specialization. Viewing from the above, metaphysics in medicine and medical practices are ontologically related in the area of life, the primacy of life and the value of life to man in

⁴⁵ Nbeta AlubaBari Desmond, “Philosophy: Subject Matter to Life and Other Disciplines”, 39 – 40.

its existence.

Conclusion

Metaphysics and medicine with its practices from its areas of specialization and disciplines looks wide apart but in reality, both of them are quite related. Life which is an ontological concept is the main concern of metaphysics and metaphysical speculations, medical practice as well concerns itself with the issue of life and the life of man in the world. Metaphysics concerns with the ontological issues of human existence and its activities, medicine and medicine practice primarily concern itself with the existence of man. In short, the main essence of the existence of medical practice is the existence of man which is also the pre-occupation of metaphysics and it is shown glaringly in the area of ethics as well apart from metaphysics. It is the rigour of metaphysical analysis and speculations that also gave rise to medical practice, metaphysics forms part and parcel of medicine and medical practice because for there to be breakthrough in medical practice, the practitioners must be a metaphysician and no wonder Immanuel Kant would tell us that metaphysics is a disposition in man. Metaphysics and medical practice have a cross-road in its foundation and most importantly in practice which involves the saving of life and life as an ontological concept used by metaphysics and medical workers every day. Even from the Hippocratic Oath sworn to by medical doctors, the main essence of the profession is to save life and it is a field that is concerned with purely humanity and humanitarian inclinations.

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