

Second-Order Philosophies: to Whose Benefit?

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Abstract

This paper entitled – Second-order Philosophies: to whose Benefit argues that Second-order Philosophies has become a very integral part of philosophy to the extent that those who are today called philosophers cannot philosophize without a tincture of the 'other' 'philosophies. Second-order philosophy is the philosophical study of other disciplines in every sphere of human intellectual acquisition. It deals with the application of the tools of philosophy that includereasoning, criticism, analysis and logic in examining, interrogating and clarifying theoretical problems in specialized disciplines especially those that used to be part of philosophy but whose departure was necessitated by the need for intellectual division of labour; including societal issues and concepts such as culture, labour, love, and so on. These studies make for increase in knowledge output and excellence in human existential engineering. The analytic method was used in the research and the paper in its findings, is of the opinion that Second-order philosophies are beneficial to the professional philosopher, the society and humanity at large. The paper recommends that no intellectual discipline should be spared the critical and rational searchlight of philosophy.

Keywords: Philosophy: Second-order studies: Second-order Philosophies: First-Order Questions: Second-order questions.

Introduction

The nature of philosophy is the nature of wonder and curiosity. A philosopher is one that takes more than a passing glance at issues and makes effort to rationally and critically proffer solution to identified problems. The problem could be that of knowledge, method or clarification of concepts. As a rational enterprise, philosophy seeks to

eradicate every taint and vestige of ignorance, superstition, prejudice, blind acceptance of ideas and any form of irrationality from human beings using human faculty of reason. With reasoning, philosophy challenges ideas, analyzes them and tests them in light of evidence and arguments. While different disciplines deal with different aspects of reality, philosophy endeavors to connect a synthesis of the entire universe with all its elements and aspects and their interconnectedness. It is not content with a partial view of the world; it rather seeks to have a synoptic view of the whole of reality.

As a critical enterprise, philosophy does a critical and analytical study of the general problems that arise from metaphysical, conventional, and traditional beliefs, including epistemological claims and practices. This aspect of philosophy explains its core areas of interests of study that include (1) Metaphysics – the study of being and reality (2) Epistemology - the study of knowledge and (3) Axiology – the study of values; moral and aesthetic. It carries out these studies using logic as a tool. Logic is the tool the philosopher uses to distinguish incorrect reasoning from correct reasoning. But apart from these core areas of philosophic interest, there are other areas that philosophy pays attention to. These other areas are called the second-order disciplines and that is the crux of this paper. Why second-order disciplines? Why is the philosopher interested in other disciplines outside its core mandate of investigations? And most importantly, who benefits from this second-order analysis of other disciplines - the philosopher, the society, or the expert in these other disciplines?

Second Order Studies

Philosophy is a rational and critical discipline that does not only questions and studies its core subject areas such as metaphysics, epistemology, axiology and logic but also questions other subjects and

the things they study. While the core philosophy areas of study ask first-order questions, second-order philosophies ask second-order questions on other subjects that are not among its core areas of interest.

An ordinary question such as “what is X?” is called a first-order question. A question about a first-order question is called a second-order question. Second-order questions, for Ed Miller, are also called 'meta-questions' or “talk about talk.”¹ According to Ishaya, Philosophy asks first-order question such as what is reality? What are the basic stuffs of the universe? What is knowledge? What is beauty? and so on. But it begins to ask second-order questions when it ask questions such as what does the scientist mean by atoms? Are scientific theories real? Or what is the purpose of law and so on.² These kinds of questions are epistemological, metaphysical and axiological in nature. Philosophy does this in relation to other disciplines that study those core subject-matters. The study of other disciplines by philosophy falls under the *philosophy of category*: for example, the philosophy of law, the philosophy of education, the philosophy of medicine, the philosophy of history, the philosophy of mathematics, the philosophy of science and so on. In the second-order studies, the philosopher is concerned with issues that border on the nature of the 'other' discipline's subject matter under examination, the adequacy of its methodology is examined; the meaning and clarification of its concepts is undertaken and analysed; its logical coherence and relation to and implication for society is critically examined. Thus, the relationship of philosophy to other disciplines is on the second-order basis. Second-order studies, that is, the “Philosophy of category”, are basically studies about studies. For example, if one takes a course in

¹ Ed Miller, *Questions that Matter: An Invitation to Philosophy* (New York: The McGraw-Hill Companies, 1996), 7.

² Samuel O. Ishaya, *Philosophy of Science: A Conceptual Introduction with Analysis of Topical Issues* (Ibadan: Hope Publications, 2023), 20.

philosophy of science; one would not light a gas burner or a Bunsen-burner in a laboratory or dissect a lizard, rather, one will be engaged in reasoning, analysing, and trying to clarify scientific concepts, claims and the methodology of the scientist. For Ojong, the problems of man assume newer dimensions in each historical epoch and because of the growing sophistication of modern society in science, technology and other spheres of human endeavours which also create new philosophical problems for mankind, the need for a philosophical appraisal of the new dimensions of knowledge has also become imperative. According to him “the latest dimension of philosophy has to do with the application of the tools of philosophy in clarifying the theoretical problems in the specialized disciplines that broke away from philosophy mainly for the sake of intellectual division of labour that makes for increase in knowledge output and excellence.”³

The Second-Order Philosophies

Following from Ojong's assertion, it is important to reemphasize that second-order philosophical studies deals with the application of the tools of philosophy (reasoning, criticism, analysis and logic) in examining and clarifying theoretical problems in specialized disciplines especially those that used to be part of philosophy that broke away necessitated by the need for intellectual division of labour, including societal issues and concepts such as culture, labour, love, and so on. These studies make for increase in knowledge output and excellence in human existential engineering. Second-order studies may be inexhaustible because of the plethora of existential issues that need philosophical scrutiny; we shall however briefly look at some that are germane to our present studies. The purpose here is to briefly examine and expose the interest of the

³. K.A. Ojong, “The Concept of Philosophy and Its Latest Dimensions” In *A Concise Introduction to Philosophy and Logic*, edited by A.F. Uduigwomen and G.O. Ozumba, 1 -25 (Calabar: Centaur Publishers, 2000), 15.

philosopher in these disciplines and thereafter decipher exactly the benefits there from and those to whom these benefits accrue.

Some of these disciplines include: Philosophy of Science, Philosophy of Social sciences, philosophy of Law, philosophy of History, Philosophy of Religion, Philosophy of Mathematics, Philosophy of Education, Philosophy of Language, Philosophy of Technology, Philosophy of Labour and Philosophy of Leisure, to mention but a few.

The Philosophy of Science

Philosophy of science can be defined as the philosophical analysis and evaluation of scientific methodologies and fundamental concepts connected to science.⁴ The philosophy of science emerged as a child of necessity to provide a philosophical foundation for the activities of the scientist. According to Ishaya, as a second-order discipline, philosophy of science analyses the theories and concepts of science. It wrestles with two aspects of inquiry namely, epistemological and ontological inquiries. Its questions include: What distinguishes the method of science from other disciplines? Are scientific theories probable or akin to provisional conjectures? Can scientific theories be verified or falsified? What distinguishes good explanation from bad explanation? What is the demarcation between science and pseudo-science?⁵

Philosophers of science questions and criticizes the claims of science. Members of the logical positivists for example questioned and rejected the use of metaphysical terms and concepts by scientist. They argued that metaphysical concepts are meaningless since they cannot be empirically verified. Philosophy of science however does not reject any knowledge

⁴. David Boersema, *Philosophy of Science: Text with Readings* (New York: Pearson Education Inc., 2009), 20.

⁵. Ishaya, *Philosophy of Science*, 60.

claim like the logical positivists; rather, it is concerned with the investigation of questions that arise from reflection about science and scientific practices. Under the Philosophy of science are specific philosophies of the sciences such as philosophy of physics, philosophy of chemistry, philosophy of biology and so on. What this implies is that the different independent disciplines of the natural sciences also have their own peculiar problems that also need the rational and critical scrutiny of the philosopher. Thus, the increase in knowledge will also demand application of the philosopher's tools in arresting the new problems that new knowledge brings.

Philosophy of Social Sciences

Philosophy of Social Science is concerned with the philosophical inquiry into the methodology of those disciplines that deals with society and its existential matters such as Sociology, Economics, Psychology, Political Science, and Criminology and so on. These disciplines study human relations and social behaviours; the philosophy of social science helps to clarify the concepts that are used in these disciplines. It also examines the world-views that determine the theoretical foundations of most social values. The philosophy of social science inquires whether the explanatory models of the natural sciences can be used in the social sciences. This question also raises the question of the similarities and differences between the social sciences and the natural sciences. The philosophy of social science according Ojong, also enquires into the problem of ideological influences, behavioural patterns, value-neutrality and objectivity in existential matters.⁶

Philosophy of Law

The Philosophy of Law examines legal concepts. It uses the critical tool to carry out thorough analysis and clarification of ambiguous legal

^{6.} Ojong, *Philosophy and Its Latest Dimensions*, 20.

concepts so as to determine their right place in language theory and the practice of law. Among the issues that the philosophy of law treats is: justice, judicial precedents, law and freedom amongst others. Also known as Jurisprudence, the philosophy of law also studies the historical development of legal systems, the nature and validity of legal doctrines and legal rules. Also, the philosophical investigation of the obligation to obey the law and the problem of legal reasoning such as the inductive and deductive approaches to modern law practice is carried out.⁷

Philosophy of History

Philosophy of History is the philosophical examination of what the historian does when engaged in the writing of history. It is the study of the historical process and its development including the methods used by historians to understand their material. The philosopher asks questions such as what is the aim of history? Are there general laws by which human history could be explained? And what kind of explanation can be given for the course of events in history? There are two branches of philosophical enquiries that try to answer the questions of the philosopher concerning history. They are Critical philosophy of history and Speculative philosophy of history. The main thrust of the critical philosophy of history is to ascertain how historical claims can be justified while the speculative philosophy of history strives to discover the purpose and patterns of event in the historical process.⁸

Philosophy of Religion

Philosophy of religion is the use of philosophical tools to examine religion and the issues therefrom. In his definition of philosophy of religion, Omoregbe averred that “philosophy of religion is a free, unprejudiced, rational inquiry into the nature, meaning and purpose of

⁷. Ojong, *Philosophy and Its Latest Dimensions*, 16.

⁸. Ojong, *Philosophy and Its Latest Dimensions*, 18

religion". For him, philosophy of religion is neither hostile to religion nor is it a defence of religion. Rather, it examines the different and conflicting claims of the various religions in the world. In doing this, the philosopher carries out a comparative analysis of various religious experiences and rituals that may be fundamental to human existence. It equally takes a critical look at the notion of God and the conflicting moral principles and belief systems of different cultures of the world. The philosopher of religion serves as an unbiased umpire who tries to sieve out the truth as they are and allow interested persons to build up their personal convictions on the belief system that appeals to their rational sense of judgment.⁹

Philosophy of Mathematics

Philosophy of mathematics is the branch of philosophy that studies the assumptions, foundations and implications of mathematics. Its main objective is to understand the nature and methods of mathematics in human existence. It involves the study of the fundamental concepts and principles of mathematics as well as the justification of mathematical statements. Philosophy of mathematics has two major themes: mathematical realism and mathematical anti-realism. Mathematical realism holds that mathematical entities exist independent of the human mind. In other words, humans do not invent mathematics, but rather discover it. Mathematical anti-realism on the other hand holds that mathematical statements have truth values, but that they do not do so by corresponding to a special realm of immaterial or non-empirical entities.¹⁰

⁹. Joseph Omoregbe, *The Philosophy of Religion: A Philosophical Look at Religion* (Lagos: Joja Educational Research and Publishers, 1993), xii.

¹⁰. Ishaya, *Philosophy of Science*, 196.

Philosophy of Education

Philosophy of Education is a second-order discipline that examines the nature of education as well as its aims and problems. It is concerned with the analysis of different theories of education; the political issues that influence education, for example, the problem of equal educational opportunities for all that desire it and the socio-political values that education should cultivate in people. Many theories of philosophy of education focus mainly on education in schools but it also encompasses other forms of education. Its theories are most times divided into descriptive and normative theories. Descriptive theories provide a value-neutral account of what education is and how to understand its basic concepts. Normative theories on the other hand, investigate how education should be practiced or what the right form of learning should be.¹¹

Philosophy of Language

Philosophy of language investigates the nature of human language, its origins and use, the relationship between meaning and truth, and how language relates to human thought and understanding as well as reality itself.¹² It examines also the determination of linguistics rules and the problem of translation of language. Philosophy of language asks questions such as: what does it mean for a word to make a reference? How does meaning correspond to reality? Do people think in language or do they think and then translate those thoughts into language? The philosophy of language has two main schools of thought: The ordinary language school of thought and the ideal language school of thought.

^{11.} Ojong, *Philosophy and Its Latest Dimensions*, 16.

^{12.} G.O.Ozumba, *Introduction to Philosophy of Language* (Ibadan: Hope Publications, 2004), 11.

Ordinary language theory holds that traditional philosophical problems are rooted in the misunderstandings that philosophers develop by distorting how words are ordinarily used to convey meaning in non-philosophical contexts. Ideal language theory on the other hand holds that an ideal language should share a structure with metaphysical reality. It is a language that is precise, free of ambiguity and clear in structure, and on the model of symbolic logic.¹³

Philosophy of Technology

Philosophy of Technology is a branch of philosophy that examines the character of technology and its relations to society. Philosophy of Technology emerged as an independent field of philosophical study in the second half of the 19th century. Its focus is mainly on the clarification of the concept with which technology can be understood. It also evaluates the social and cultural roles of technology. It has different branches that focuses on different aspects of scientific and human existence; for example, ethics of technology, the relation between science and technology, the relationship between human and technology, including the political dimensions of technology.¹⁴

Philosophy of Labour

Philosophy of labour is the branch of philosophy that examines and investigates issues involved in labour relations such as the nature of labour, the purpose of labour, labour laws, labour movements, industrial conflict, and conflict resolution in the pursuit of the purpose of labour. In other words, philosophy of labour is the free rational and critical examination of the nature meaning and purpose of labour. Philosophy of labour is neither hostile, antagonistic or biased against labour nor is it

^{13.} Ozumba, Philosophy of Language, 14.

^{14.} University of Twente, Philosophy of Technology and Design: Shaping the Relations between Humans and Technologies. <https://www.futurelearn.com/onfo/com/>

sympathetic or a defence of labour and labour related issues. It is rather an unprejudiced and unbiased investigation into the nature, meaning and purpose of labour.

The philosophy of labour began as a rational quest to provide a philosophical foundation for the activities of the employer and the employee. This led to the emergence of philosophers who questioned and criticized the claims of employers on one hand and the employee on the other hand. Among this class of philosophers were Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. These men raised pertinent questions about the relationship between the slave and the master; the proletariat and the bourgeois including the problem of alienation. For them, “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles; freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman; in a word, oppressor and oppressed...”¹⁵ Thus, as a second-order discipline, Philosophy of labour is a branch of philosophy that examines and investigates issues involved in labour relations such as the nature of the 'struggle' between the oppressor and the oppressed including the axiological and metaphysical implications therefrom. It investigates and critically examines the purpose of labour and the intent of both the employer and the employee in the production process.¹⁶

The Philosophy of Leisure

Philosophy of leisure is an evolving second-order studies in philosophy that critically evaluates and examines the notion and purpose of leisure. It differentiates according to Barrett, between “work and leisure”¹⁷ and

^{15.} Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Translated by S. Moore, <https://www.pdfdrive.net>

^{16.} Samuel O. Ishaya and C.B. Okoro, PHL 313: *Philosophy of Labour and Leisure* (Abuja: NOUN Press, 2022), 6. <https://www.nou.edu.ng>

^{17.} C. Barrett, “Introduction” In *The Philosophy of Leisure*, edited by T. Winniffrith and C. Barrett (Palgrave: Macmillan, 1998), 1.

raises moral and ethical questions about leisure. For example, what type of activities should one value and pursue? Is the happy but ignorant life a good life or something more is needed? The philosophy of leisure encourages one to turn attention from morality to ethics. Morality refers to the sub-branch of ethics that deals with obligation – what you must do. “Ethics on the other hand enquires into the nature of the good life. This was the concern of the ancient philosophers. The question for them was not “what ought I to do?”, but rather “what sort of person ought I to be? And what sort of life should I lead?” The philosophy of leisure seeks to discover and choose the best life available for society and the individuals therein.

Today we live in a world where people work longer hours with fewer holidays and dedicate themselves largely to passive activities in their spare time. To some professional philosophers, the philosophy of leisure does not carry the weight of metaphysics, epistemology or the philosophy of science, logic, the philosophy of language or ethics and therefore does not attract philosophical scrutiny. Only few philosophy departments offer “Philosophy of Leisure” as a course. For Alex Sage, this neglect is a mistake going by Aristotle's writings “that happiness is thought to depend on leisure; for we are busy that we may have leisure and make war that we may live in peace”¹⁸

With the advent of digital economies, high-tech, fintech, and social media communities and societies, new forms of leisure activities are evolving. The philosophy of leisure is expected to examine leisure activities in the digital world. In the digital world, people are increasingly interconnected but also increasingly isolated. Facebook friends are many but face-to-face contacts are dwindling. Human nature

¹⁸. Alex Sage, “A Plea for Philosophy of Leisure” In Philosophy Now, <https://www.philosophynow.org>

is merging with technology – from Webcam to Website, from search engine to chat rooms, work and leisure seem to be carefully but certainly packed in android phones, laptops, tablets desktops and other ICT devices. Is the line between work and leisure becoming thinner or has it disappeared? Philosophy of leisure explores the need for a 'happy-hour' in every society.¹⁹

Evaluation

Philosophy as a second-order discipline is basically concerned with the interrogation of critical problems and issues that arise from studies and investigations going on in other disciplines. The basis of this concern stems from the philosophic curiosity to subject the aims, methodology and results of other disciplines to rigorous analysis and evaluation. Apart from this, there is also the ethical, metaphysical and epistemological evaluation of the practices of these other disciplines. For example, in his book, *Conjectures and Refutations*, Karl Popper told a story of how he began to feel more and more dissatisfied and even dubious, with the Marxist theory of history, Psychoanalysis and Individual psychology. The problem that bothered him were questions such as 'what is wrong with Marxism, psychoanalysis and individual psychology? Why are they so different from physical theories; from Newton's theory and especially from the theory of relativity? His worry was neither the problem of truth, nor the problem of exactness or measurability; it was rather that he felt that these three theories, though posing as sciences, had in fact more in common with primitive myths than with science; that they resembled astrology rather than astronomy.²⁰ Now the point to note from Popper's worries from the foregoing is that, that is exactly the preoccupation of philosophers when they engage in interrogating the claims of other

¹⁹. Samuel O. Ishaya and C.B. Okoro, *Philosophy of Labour and Leisure*, 82.

²⁰. Karl Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 45.

disciplines. So, philosophy as second order discipline examines and interrogates salient and problematic issues in other academic and social issues such as science, law, social sciences, ICT, love, friendship, labour, leisure and so on.

But why is philosophy interested in all other disciplines? For Laura Sims, it is because philosophy is the 'queen of all disciplines'. By these, according to her, it is meant that philosophy is the mother of all disciplines. It gave birth to all disciplines. The fact remains that in the early days of intellectual development, history, geography, astronomy, politics, mathematics, biology, and so on were undertaken by philosophers who drew no distinction between these disciplines and philosophy but reflected on these subject matters as their contribution to philosophy.²¹ Another example should suffice; Lawhead notes that when a philosophical turmoil gripped the Golden Age of Greece, the Sophists stepped in to fill the lacuna. Sophists were philosophers who travelled from place to place to teach and guide people about practical matters of existence, especially the art of argument for a fee. According to him, when the Sophist – Protagoras was asked what a student would learn from him, he replied 'the proper care of his personal affairs, so that he may best manage his own household and also of the state's affairs, so as to become a real power in the city both as a speaker and man of action'.²² The point here is that from the beginning, philosophy did not discriminate any area of intellectual pursuit so long as the aim was geared towards eradicating ignorance and enthroning knowledge. Even now, it is important to note that even though there is a glaring separation of other disciplines from philosophy, these other disciplines still have

²¹. Laura Sims, "Philosophy as a Second-order Discipline" In *Side player*, <https://www.sideplayer.com>>

²². William F. Lawhead, *The Voyage of Discovery: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (USA: Wadsworth, 2002), 30.

some philosophical questions that surround them. This is because it is not all questions asked by a discipline that can be answered empirically; there always metaphysical, ethical or epistemological questions to tackle.

So, who benefits from second-order studies? The first beneficiary to the philosophers' inquiry into the activities of other disciplines is the 'other' discipline itself. By its critical nature, philosophy subjects the claims of other disciplines to critical analysis which in turn helps these other disciplines to either properly explain their claims or make amends where necessary. Another beneficiary to second-order philosophy disciplines is the society and humanity at large. In this instance, the speculative nature of philosophy is put to action. The speculative aspect of philosophy makes it a system builder. In other words, philosophy uses its rational insight to fashion and create new ideas, ideologies and worldviews that benefits particular societies and humanity at large at the long run. For example, the Greek philosophers' speculations about the ideal state beginning with Plato, to Aristotle, to The Sophists amongst others brought about the practice of democracy in its refined form today.

Conclusion

From the exposition and analysis made, it is agreed that apart from the core branches of philosophy that include metaphysics, epistemology and axiology, there are other intellectual areas that philosophy interrogates. These other areas known as the second order disciplines in philosophy has indeed become very integral parts of philosophizing to the extent that anyone and everyone interested in philosophy must as a matter of necessity be interested in second-order disciplines without which one cannot have a firm grasp of philosophy. Also the work of the philosopher in his/her inquiries about other disciplines helps society to understands the workings of other disciplines – their methods and claims to

knowledge amongst other claims. The paper recommends that no intellectual discipline should be spared the critical and rational searchlight of philosophy. This will bring about a better understanding of other disciplines' methods and knowledge claims for the betterment of man and society.

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