

LANDSCAPING EXISTENCE AND HUMAN EXISTENCE WITH PHILOSOPHY ON HOLIDAY

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Abstract

It was Battista Mondin who declared that 'man is an impossible possibility'. Put in other words, this philosophico-anthropological rendition by Mondin is an open cheque analysis that humanity has the capacity to make what may appear impossible, very possible. This pronouncement is only semantically different from the existentialists' understanding of man. To the existentialists, 'man is a being that is what it is not'. That is, man or humanity is not a finished product, manufactured or produced and placed on the shelf, but rather a dynamic being capable of giving meaning or defining existence and human existence. This is akin to the Protagorean assertion that 'man is the measure of all things...'. In other words, existence and human existence cannot but, be best defined and given meaning to, only by the human. To achieve this, man relies heavily on philosophy for development, meaning, liberation and elevation. Premised on this, the paper explores, by way of demonstrating that existence and human existence devoid of philosophy, is existence lacking in meaningful meaning. The study employs philosophical analysis to achieve its objective. The conclusion of this study is that philosophy as a critical activity is inevitable in the liberation, enlightening of humanity, giving meaning to existence and human existence. Simply put, meaningful existence and human existence cannot be without philosophy.

Keywords: Philosophy, Existence, Human(ity), Human Existence, Development, Meaning-making, Liberation, Elevation

Introduction

From antiquity, as documented, meaningful human cosmic and ontological consciousness or awareness were prompted by mythology or stark ignorance. Mythology was taken as a body of

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overwhelming basic knowledge claims regarding the natural and supernatural as well as human beings. It was also regarded as knowledge-base about a particular socio-cultural group of people that exists or had existed. In other words, mythology was the only source of knowledge claim that could be adopted in the explanation or interpretation of the physical and the super-physical realities in the era of antiquity. Ignorance on its part was an overwhelming situation in which an individual could not lay reasonable claim to anything but simply, express bewilderment or amazement to experiences or encounters.

Meanwhile, one major characteristic of the mythological sphere, was that knowledge claims were opaque as mysticism, superstitions and supernaturalism, including magic held sway. In other words, knowledge claims were absolutely bereft of certainty; systematism, procedure and objectivity. Mythological stories often told or written held the listeners or the reader spellbound as these told stories were replete with ambiguities, fairy-tales and unsubstantiated claims, especially when such listeners or readers were not conversant with the world-view of such a socio-cultural group. This mythological atmospheric situation gave room for the rise of religious consciousness and beliefs which began with animism; a universal primitive religious consciousness and conviction by the early man that dreams and visions were explainable by associating the idea of the soul (spirit) to humans and that the soul(spirit) persists after the death of the physical body. Animism, especially in the African context, is the conviction that a supernatural spirit exists and an aspect of this spirit permeates and influences all existing things both animate and inanimate (by the way, this view appears pantheistic). The religious stanza which was more enduring, sustained itself far longer than the earlier noted

stages. As a matter of fact, religion functioned simultaneously with mythology, superstition and supernaturalism. It was in the midst of this conglomeration that philosophy as a critical human activity became fermented, brewed, and eventually became an inevitable human consumable. The human consumption of philosophy is simply that, philosophy, due to its rational, logical and critical nature, became an adopted quintessential tool or medium through which humankind could make profound, informed and nuanced enquiries about broad issues of existence in general and human existence in particular. Thus, need we ask what is Philosophy? Again, need we seek to define it? Very often people are heard talking about or alluding to philosophy. It is common knowledge to hear during discussions or conversations, expressions like; “This is my philosophy”, “My philosophy is that” or “My philosophy is such and such” or “What is your philosophy”, etc. The explanations emanating from these expressions may not be very comprehensible to an individual who is a philosophy neophyte hence the need to make some clarifications. What then is philosophy considering its impact on humanity in terms of liberation, development, elevation, meaning-making, self-definition and disclaimers, etc. in existence? In other words, what makes philosophy so significant to human existence and indeed, existence at large that meaningful existence cannot be thought of without it (philosophy)? The discourse attempts a critical analysis of these concerns and other related issues.

On the Nature of Philosophy

One of the problematics that jolts a philosopher is to ask him/her: What is philosophy? This seeming embarrassment stems from the nature of the discipline of philosophy. Philosophy attracts myriads of definitions. This is the case because no philosopher has been able

to advance a universally acceptable definition of the discipline. Etymologically, philosophy is sourced from two Greek words: *Phileu* or *philos* and *sophia*, which translate to *phileusophia* or *philosophia*, meaning philosophy in English. *Phileu* or *philos* refers to 'love' while *sophia* is 'wisdom' or 'knowledge'. Premised on this etymology, philosophy is referred to as 'love of wisdom or knowledge' while the philosopher is referred to as a 'lover of wisdom or knowledge'. In ancient Greek philosophy, Pythagoras was the first person to earn the accolade 'wise man'. He however, made a disclaimer of this attribution, preferring to be addressed as a 'lover of wisdom'. Wisdom to him was more acceptable because he knew he was ignorant and therefore, needed wisdom. However, considering the monumental contributions of Pythagoras to human knowledge in the areas of philosophy, religion, mathematics, numerology, music and sciences, etc, can he be rightly described as an ignorant man? Perhaps, it suffices to mention here, some of his enduring legacies to humanity and knowledge at large, which include: Pythagoras theorem and theory of numbers (numerology) to mathematics, Orphism to religion, astronomy to science and music to entertainment, etc which only demonstrated that his claim of being ignorant was only a sarcasm.

Now it is pertinent to ask: What is wisdom and why is the philosopher so much overwhelmed by it? Arthur J. Minton seems to provide the answer saying that “wisdom is knowledge directed to the fundamental and pervasive concerns of existence.”³ This refers to existence that is ubiquitous and manifesting in diverse facets and it subsequently, constitutes the basic interest of enquiry or philosophical activity which only wisdom carries out. As Minton

³. Minton, Arthur J. *Philosophy: Paradox and Discovery*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1976), Pg. xvii.

further explains, “the desire of wisdom is to seek the principles that cut through the superficial and trivial facts that clutter our intellectual landscape, revealing the basic shape of things beneath.”⁴ Put in other words, wisdom aims at knowledge that is certain and indubitable, beyond the surface claims which only philosophical activity can expose. Wisdom as a concept is thus, a propelling force for philosophical enquiry or activity. In their contribution to the notion of wisdom, David Steward and H. Gene Blocker, et al assert that “when the ancient Greeks referred to wisdom, they usually meant the knowledge of the fundamental principles and laws, an awareness of that which was basic and unchanging, as opposed to those things that were transitory and changing.”⁵ Thus, it could be inferred that the engagement of philosophy with wisdom is to arrive at the ultimate meaning of reality of things from the basis.

Suffice it to note from the outset that Minton's fundamental and pervasive concerns of existence as well as Steward and Blocker's, *et al*, fundamental principles and laws according to Zaato Nor could be 'cosmological, ontological, anthropological, metaphysical, epistemological, and axiological, etc. in content'.⁶ This is a re-echo of Aristotle who says that philosophy is prompted by 'wonder'. What this means is that 'wonder' could be prompted by any of the above mentioned and more. For example, 'metaphysical and ontological wonder' could prompt questions like: Why is there

⁴. Minton, Arthur J. *Philosophy: Paradox and Discovery*, Pg. xvii.

⁵. Steward, D., Blocker, H. G., & Petrick, J., *Fundamentals of Philosophy*, New York: Prentice-Hall, 2010), Pg. 1.

⁶. Nor, Zaato M. “Philosophy and Human Existence”, in Ihuah, Alloy S., (Ed), *Philosophy and Human Existence: Critical Essays in Philosophical Discourse*, (Deutschland:Verlag: LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing A&G Co. KG Dudweiler Landstr, 2010), Pg. 47.

something instead of nothing? What sort of things or objects exist? Does the world have a beginning? Will it come to an end? Was it created or it evolved? Who created it? How did it evolve? Etc. The attempt to answer any of these questions and other related ones, is marked as a beginning of a philosophical activity.

It is apparent from the foregoing that philosophy can be defined from any of these subject-matters individually or collectively, as the fundamental and pervasive concerns of existence are promptings for philosophical activities. This is what informs C.D. Broad's definition of philosophy that "philosophy is what philosophers do."⁷ Certainly, philosophers do philosophy. But someone not versed in philosophy would still readily ask: What is philosophy? Broad's submission only amounts to saying, for instance, that medicine is what medicine practitioners or medics practice or do. Similarly, it is tantamount to saying that law is what lawyers practice or do. These kinds of explanations simply lead to ambiguity and accordingly, imply that the WHAT, WHY and HOW of philosophy or law, that is, the nature of philosophical or legal activities; the aim, relevance and the methodology employed in philosophising and legal processes are familiar to everyone. This thinking is simply ambitious if not weird.

On the Definition of Philosophy

Thus far, two points are clearly underscored here:

- ✓ That philosophy as it is known, is a coinage from two Greek words which translate to 'love of wisdom/knowledge' while the philosopher is a lover of wisdom/knowledge.

⁷. Broad, C. D., "Two Lectures on the Nature of Philosophy" in H. D. Lewis (Ed), *Clarity is Not Enough: Essays in Criticism of Linguistic Philosophy*, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1963), Pg. 59.

- ✓ That philosophical activity stems from 'wonder' which could be physical or super-physical. Philosophical activity simply means whatever may stimulate a philosopher to initiate the critical activity of questioning or thinking and advancing answers. The motivation may be informed by existential wonder or cosmo-metaphysical wonder, etc. There is little or no controversy trailing these two positions as philosophers universally are not averse to these facts of philosophy. Indeed, these two issues largely mark the points of convergence of philosophers universally. Apart from these two endorsements, philosophers have subsequently disagreed on most issues of philosophy beginning with the definition of philosophy itself. In other words, philosophers have not found one particular definition of philosophy so appealing to attract unanimous acceptance. As a matter of fact, there are as many definitions of philosophy as philosophers remain enmeshed in different thoughts about existence and human existence predicated on individuals' diverse experiences. However, philosophers define philosophy according to their orientation or interest in a particular area of philosophical activity. Apart from orientation, philosophers also define philosophy from the perspective of culture, ideology, experience, age / era / epoch, programme / agenda, method as well as content.

Nevertheless, for the purposes of this work, we shall consider just a few definitions as guides. Drawing his definition from the conception of philosophy as 'love of wisdom,' Minton avers that "philosophy, as a quest for wisdom, is an attempt to provide a vision of the world that is systematic and clear, in which the contentions

between significant facts are made manifest.”⁸ In view of its nature as conceived, Minton stresses that philosophy searches for the first things and the last things - for the first principles and their ultimate implications. As if explicating Minton's submission, Joseph Omoregbe defines philosophy as “a rational search for answers to the basic questions about the ultimate meaning of reality as a whole and of human life in particular”.⁹ In his contribution, Peter K. McInerney maintains that “Philosophy is the activity of thinking about the ultimate questions and attempting to develop good, rational reasons for holding one particular position rather another.”¹⁰ Apart from providing a clear and systematic vision of the world where significant facts are revealed, that is, adopting a particular view instead of another and holistic existence, Olusegun Oladipo stresses that “philosophy provides the intellectual frameworks for perceiving, feeling and transforming realities; whether social, political, cultural, religious and so on.”¹¹ Oladipo adds that philosophy is nothing but a critical activity, challenging the prevailing description of ourselves and our situation. An inference from these submissions demonstrates that philosophy is preoccupied with:

- Providing rational, systematic and clear answers about the world where a clear distinction is made between belief and knowledge. This is in addition to availing humanity an avenue to rationally disclaim or debunk unfounded aspersions cast on individuals, socio-cultural groups and even races. Meanwhile, belief and knowledge are two sides

⁸. Minton, Arthur J. *Philosophy: Paradox and Discovery*, Pg. xvii.

⁹. Omoregbe, Joseph., *Knowing Philosophy: A General Introduction*, (Lagos: JERP, 1990), Pg. 3.

¹⁰. McInerney, Peter K., *Introduction to Philosophy*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992), Pg. 1.

¹¹. Oladipo, O., *Philosophy, Literature and the African Novel*, Pg. 14.

of a coin, as they go hand in hand in human quest for knowledge.

- The basic, fundamental or ultimate questions about being or existence as it is captured in the traditional branches of philosophy – Metaphysics, Epistemology and Axiology. In fact, stressing the importance of “ultimate questions”, McInerney maintains that they “concern the basic feature of our world-view.”¹²
- The attainment of the ultimate meaning of what constitutes reality in the universe. In this context, philosophy is taken as a problem-solving activity which reviews life holistically, that is, materialistic and non-materialistic existence being.
- And finally, from the definitions, philosophy explores human existence or condition in totality. Indeed, human life or existence constitutes the richest source and by far, the most significant aspect of philosophy. All philosophical activities revolve around the human being.

Predicated on these engagements of philosophy, it could also be defined as a critical endeavour or enterprise that explores the nature, structure of existence both physical and super physical, including human thought in order to demonstrate the meaningfulness and, or lack of meaningfulness of things and objects in human socio-physical and super-physical existences. These concerns of philosophy are clear indicators that philosophy is centred on the totality of existence, human existence and world-view.

Granted that philosophy is interested in the holistic nature of existence as well as the insatiable and sustained quest to determine the meaning of existence, then, it would not be out of place to stress

^{12.} McInerney, Peter K., *Introduction to Philosophy*, Pg. 1.

here that, all human attempts in the diverse knowledge areas to arrive at the meaning of reality, are all, subsumed under philosophy as the first intellectual discipline that ever was. No doubt, this was and remains the status of philosophy. At the point of the commencement of any critical enquiry, systematic and objective knowledge, philosophy had all the existing known disciplines under its umbrella. That is why philosophy in this regard, is taken as the mother or father of all disciplines. It is therefore, no wonder that, at the peak of an individual's academic endeavour or career, he/she is admitted into the Degree of the Doctor of Philosophy, in such an area. For example, one is referred to as holder of the Degree of the Doctor of Philosophy in Science (PhD), etc. In other words, since all disciplines emerged from philosophy and are also philosophising in those identified areas, when all is said and done, they must revert to their source of origin by way of identification and recognition. As a matter of fact, the relationship between philosophy and other disciplines could be likened to that of a traveler or an adventurer, who, upon the end of an adventure, must return home to articulate or narrate his/her adventure to the audience at home. And the people at home represent philosophy. It is only out of ignorance that an academic would disclaim philosophy as the discipline of all disciplines. So, all disciplines (physical sciences, pseudo-sciences and humanities) are doing philosophy of a sort, one way or the other in their specialised areas or fields.

On the Nature of Existence

The English word existence is a coinage from the Latin word '*existentia*' and it means the act of being. Existence as such is ascribed to physically observable phenomena as well as non-physically observable phenomena. Thus, existence is rightly

ascribed to houses, cars, humans, animals, Gods, spirits, forces, matter, mind and electromagnative waves, etc. Meanwhile, philosophy as a broad-based critical knowledge activity, through the many disciplines that emerged from it, has designated particular disciplines that study the foregoing existents or acts of being and many more, for a more holistic understanding of existence. The act of being, according to Jacques Maritain, has two discernible distinctions. There is “existence as the fact of existing (*existentia actu exercito*) and existence as an object of thought (*existentia ut quod quid est*).”¹³ Maritain stresses that “existence based on its bifocal nature, assumes objective status and thus, constitutes the object of thought and confronts the intellect as a particular essence or quality.”¹⁴ In other words, what makes up existence is what is regarded as being factual and non-factual as such a thing or object can be sensed, imagined, thought of, and perceived or experienced, etc. As insinuated above, it suffices to state that all existents have fixed or non-fixed essence(s) or quality(ies). However, as the existentialists insist, all things or objects as existents, except human existence, have fixed essence(s) or quality(ies). Things or objects as such, are categorised as 'finished products or beings' whose essence(s) or quality(ies) can be perfectly predicted. It is arising from this understanding that Martin Heidegger denies the act of being or existence to things or objects except to *Dasein* – a German word which means 'being there', 'there being' or simply 'existence'. However, in its technical application by Heidegger, it designates 'human reality', 'human being', 'human existence', or 'man'. Heidegger, on this backdrop, logically declares that “God is but

^{13.} Maritain, J. *An Introduction to Philosophy*, (New York: Continuum, 2005), Pg. 122.

^{14.} Maritain, J. *An Introduction to Philosophy*, Pg. 122.

does not exist, mountains are but they do not exist, etc. because they are of a fixed nature.”¹⁵ Heidegger is so convinced because, except for *Dasein*, all the other afore-mentioned existents have fixed nature and are, therefore not conscious of their being. Unlike existents with fixed nature, human being is dynamic and meaning-making being that is conscious of its existence and other existents. This awareness is totally absent in the other existents. Thus, to Heidegger, 'they are but cannot be said to exists.'

To exist is to be self-conscious. Being self-conscious, such an existent can exhibit dynamism. Being dynamic, such a being can make meaning of existence, out of existence and its own existence. This quality solely rests with the human being or *Dasein*. Jean-Paul Sartre is only semantically different from Heidegger. Jean-Paul Sartre acknowledges *être-pour-soi* (being-for-itself) and *être-en-soi* (being-in-itself) which means 'conscious being' and 'non-conscious being', respectively.¹⁶ Like Heidegger's *Dasein*, it is only Sartre's *être-pour-soi* that is capable of self-determination because it has the elasticity and dynamism to make choices and find meaning that defines the *être-pour-soi*.¹⁷ Essentially, philosophy is what it is because it is best identified by its activities; enablement to making rational choices, finding meaning, critical thinking and indeed, the preoccupation with 'wonder' by advancing critical questions and providing rational answers, constitute the hallmark of philosophical activities.

¹⁵ Heidegger, M., *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, Manhein, R., (Trans), New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), Pg. 89.

¹⁶ Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, Barnes, Hazel E. (Trans.), (New York, NY 10022: Citadel Press Books, 2001), Pg. lxiii.

¹⁷ Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Being and Nothingness: A Phenomenological Essay on Ontology*, Pg. lxii.

Correlation Between Philosophical Activity(ies), Human(ity) and Human Existence

Philosophical Activity(ies): philosophical activity(ies) embarked upon by humans, stem(s) from 'wonder'. Reflections, critical thought and curiosity, etc. about the 'wonder' in question in order to arrive at the meaning of such 'wonder', which may include the being of humanity but not limited to it, prompt what is referred to as philosophical activity(ies). As earlier adumbrated, McInerney argues that 'the main value of thinking about 'wonder' is that it makes us consider new possibilities, exercise our intellectual and imaginative abilities, and reflect on both life and customs.'¹⁸ In other words, human being is seen as the engineer of critical thought and imaginative abilities which culminate into philosophical activities with the aim of attaining new understandings about existence and human existence. Thus, humanity as the only being that is self-aware of itself, is the only being, as Heidegger would say, that comports itself in being in order to define itself and make meaning out of being. Indeed, all attempts at finding meaning about existence and human existence constitute philosophical activity(ies). Thus, even the physical sciences and non-physical sciences, are enmeshed in philosophical activities in order to arrive at the meaning of reality as exemplified in existence and human existence. "Reality", McInerney, says, "both in everyday life and in philosophical thought, is that which exists on its own, independent of what anyone thinks."¹⁹ In other words, reality is that which is whether or not anyone perceives or understands or acknowledges it. For instance, God as the Supreme Being does not require human endorsement in order for Him to be. Physical and non-physical objects as Maritain explains are *existentia actu exercito*.

¹⁸. McInerney, Peter K., *Introduction to Philosophy*, Pg. 3.

¹⁹. McInerney, Peter K., *Introduction to Philosophy*, Pg. 23.

Human(ity): as an existent, is a being or animal that is distinguishable from other beings or animals by the attributes or categories of rationality, consciousness, self-projection, morality, meaning-making and ensoulment.

- Rationality: human being is described as a rational being or animal in contrast to the being of other beings as they cannot rationally explain issues concerning their being. Human being deploys the tools of critical thinking, logicity and reasoning to attain objective meaning, in his/her holistic engagement with existence. This, in other words, means human being is an individual that admits thought in his/her actions non-dogmatically. The concern about holistic human existence is objectively considered devoid of prejudice or sentiments. As a matter of fact, humans with the adoption of the tool of rationality, can meaningfully critique ideologies and human values, showing their defects while offering new ways of doing things.

- Consciousness: the awareness that one knows that he/she knows that he/she is there (exists); in a particular place and time, carrying out one activity or the other, and he/she, upon enquiry, can say exactly tell what he/she is doing, defines consciousness. Self-consciousness of an individual dovetails into consciousness of the other individual(s), that is, being with others. This to a greater extent, informs the idea of gregariousness in human existence where rules or principles of human existence naturally evolve to protect the rights of one another. Consciousness leads to many awareness's.

- Self-projection: human being in his/her consciousness is a self-projecting being. He/her is conscious that he/her possesses

inherent reservoir of potentials. By these potentials, he/she is qualified ala Battista Mondin, as a being of 'impossible possibilities.' Human being as could be empirically acknowledged, has, in diverse ways conquered nature and indeed, dominated it. And the credit for such must not be taken away from human ingenuity, creativity, curiosity and the insatiable quest for sustainable self-transformation as well as nature. Humanity remains a desire to be something more or better.

- Morality: this is yet another quintessential attribute that distinguishes human animal from the lower animals. Ordinarily, morality defines approvable and non-approvable ways of conducting oneself in social existence. The awareness of these principles is innate in humans and therefore, they regulate human conduct in their gregarious existence. For example, there is no known socio-cultural group that approves incest in their community. Meanwhile, in the animal kingdom, there is no distinction between 'father and children, children and mother, brothers and sisters. The lower animals would mate indiscriminately unlike humans without any feeling of remorse. In other words, the consciousness to determine what is good or bad, right and wrong, are better identified in humans. Philosophy as such trains humans in moral matters as it insists on ideal life to be lived by humanity.

- Meaning-making: endowed with the sense of rationality, consciousness and complemented with morality, human beings make meaning of existence and their existence despite existence's complex and dynamic nature. Human being as a meaning-making creature, determines social and moral values, development and organisation of the society, transformation, change and polices, etc.

For instance, philosophy shapes democratic values.

- **Ensoulement:** ensoulement is the identification of the human as a being that is composite, that is, made up of the physical body and the spiritual body. The ensoulement of humanity invokes the idea of human spirituality. By human spirituality, the idea of the superhuman being is canvassed and consequently, different religions are revealed or evolved in order to satisfy this spiritual yearning. This as mentioned above, could be traced to mythology. However, the idea of the soul being embedded in human being makes a lot of meaning to the religious people and even those who concede to life in the hereafter.

Ultimately, these critical attributes, philosophically, distinguished the human animal from the other animals. These philosophical qualities or attributes of humanity indeed, contrast with the biological attributes like procreation, response to stimuli, survival instinct, love, emotions and care, etc. which are clearly demonstrated in most living things including plants.

Human Existence: Thus far, human existence is considered as the only meaningful existence. Human existence refers to the existence of the human individual concretely with their experiences in space and time. The human individuals in their concrete existence and experience are challenged by some basic ontological questions whether there is an objective existence of life which they have to identify and live by or not. While some philosophers answer this question in the affirmative, others negate this all together. The existentialists in their negation of this ontological question argue that humans have no preordained essence. In this wise, human being is highly regarded in the existentialist's philosophy as a

dynamic being. Jim Unah says this of Heidegger that he declared that 'human existence is a reservoir of meanings.'²⁰ Though the existentialists acknowledge the *facticity* of death, they are convinced that humanity has the capacity to overcome their present state of being in order to carve (an) essence or essence(s) for their self. In other words, humanity consciously seek and attain their essence which is even though insatiable. Understood as such, humanity has no fixed essence. As Zaato Nor quips 'humanity is a desire to be. It is what it is and it is what it is not.'²¹ In other words, the individual human in his/her concrete existence is in a process of constant self-creation, becoming, redefinition, self-projection and transcendence. He/she is an unfinished product and therefore, capable of attracting new meanings and definitions. Eleanor Kuykendall passionately expresses the primacy of philosophy to human existence and philosophers. According to him:

Philosophers of every methodological persuasion - analytic, existentialist, and even Marxist - now take the nature and quality of human existence as a point of departure for even their most abstract speculations. Whether they begin with the nature of human communication, the contents of human consciousness, or the organisation of human society, philosophers begin their analysis in every case, with the human.²²

^{20.} Unah, Jim I. *Heidegger's Existentialism: A Essay on Applied Ontology*, (Lagos: Panaf Publishing Inc., 1996), 57.

^{21.} Zaato Nor *Subjectivity and Consciousness of the 'Other' in Sartrean Existentialism: Interpretative Analyses of Human Social Relations in Africa*, in *Zaria Journal of Liberal Arts (ZAJOLA)*, (Zaria: Faculty of Arts, Ahmadu Bello University, 2007), Pg. 50.

^{22.} Kuykendall, E., (Ed), *Philosophy in the Age of Crisis*, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1970), Pg. x.

However, as earlier noted, the involvement of the philosopher with human condition and world-view invariably raises some ultimate questions. These questions arise in connection with the beliefs and values as they are collectively embedded in the world-view of a people.

On this note, world-view is recognised, as such, as a mirror which captures the sum total of the essence of a people. It provides a platform for the exhibition of the identity of a people and all that they subscribe to and reject. As a matter of fact, it is the world-view that confers a culture and indeed, an identity on a people. No doubt, individuals have their world-views, but it is not the distinct individuals' world-views that define a socio-cultural group. Propelled by this understanding, Oladipo defines world-view as “a combination of a general picture of the world and the place of man in it and those beliefs and ideals – for example, economic, socio-political, philosophical, moral, religious and aesthetic – derived or even derivable, from it.”²³ This is to say that in the broad picture that exists, humanity occupies a strategic position in it and partakes in the existing beliefs and defines what values are as well as the ideal ones to look up to. This is adequately acknowledged by the two perspectives of world-view as advanced by Oladipo, which are Communal and Philosophical. In other words, there is Communal world-view and Philosophical world-view. He explains that they are characterised by unconsciousness and non-rationality on the one hand and consciousness and theory on the other, respectively. According to him, “a world-view is communal when it arises out of the collective experience of a people which is a product of the

²³. Oladipo, O., *Philosophy, Literature and the African Novel*, (Ibadan: Option Book and Information Services, 1993), Pg. 2.

interaction between them and nature and among themselves.”²⁴ In other words, it is a collective social consciousness which is shared by members of the society arising from their experiences and tradition as handed down from their fore bearers. Oladipo further explains that being a generative world-view which springs from the socio-physical human condition and experiences of the people, communal world-view is transmitted through socialisation processes and at the same time validated on the basis of the authority of tradition. Consequently, it is described as unconscious and non-rational. The people simply adopt and propagate what was handed down to them from their fore bearers without questions. In spite of the nature of communal world-view, it remains invaluable. This is so due to the inherent seeds of intellectual ferment contained therein which prompt calls for transformation or renewal. This is where philosophical world-view comes into focus. That is, it enables the possibility of critical reflection on the prevailing values and beliefs in order to advance new positions.

Philosophical world-view on the other hand, through critical reflection, adopts and refines the unconscious but potent elements in the communal world-view and theoretically validates them by advancing value(s), moral and logical reasons for such elements. This encompassing nature of world-view informs some philosophical issues of theoretical concern to the philosopher. Consequently, Nor, asserts that “the preoccupation of the philosopher with the ultimate questions contained therein the world-view makes manifest the objective and practical relevance of philosophy.”²⁵ He stresses that philosophy as such, gives impetus to

^{24.} Oladipo, O., *Philosophy, Literature and the African Novel*, Pg. 3

^{25.} Zaato Nor *Subjectivity and Consciousness of the 'Other' in Sartrean Existentialism: Interpretative Analyses of Human Social Relations in Africa*, Pg. 48.

critical reflection on the basic questions and axioms in order to arrive at answers absorbed of dogmatism and unsubstantiated beliefs. This activity clearly marks philosophy out as an intellectual activity with enormous practical relevance. The implication of this is that philosophical searchlight can be beamed on any aspect of human life to deconstruct and reconstruct such. It is therefore no wonder that H. S. Staniland defines philosophy as “the critical examination of the ideas we live by.”²⁶ By such analyses, new and contemporary orientations to match and indeed, resolve the prevailing human condition are generated.

Existence and Human Existence with Philosophy in Abeyance

It is apparent from the outset of this research that existence or act of being refers to both animate and inanimate objects or things. Animals (including humans), plants and other living things belong to the class of animate objects while rocks/stones, oceans/ivers, Gods/spirit, soul, planets, cars, and chemicals, etc. are inanimate objects. Of course, all (animate and inanimate) have existence and are therefore, existents. However, it is human existence that is distinctive. This distinction starkly manifest based on the insatiable desire and curiosity by human being to get at the meaning of existence and human existence. Other animate objects by their nature, appear contented in their being and bother less about the meaning of their existence. As previously adumbrated, human existence being an enormous source of defining existence and self-existence, is made possible via wisdom. Wisdom as earlier shown aims at demonstrating that knowledge is certain and indubitable, beyond the surface claims which only philosophical activity can expose. Philosophy taken as a continuous search for wisdom,

²⁶. Oladipo, O., *Philosophy, Literature and the African Novel*, Pg. 3.

provides a vision for existence and human existence that is orderly, systematic and distinct. It accordingly shows the distinctions between trivial claims and significant facts about existence. Wisdom as a concept is thus, a propelling force for philosophical enquiry or activity. In view of its nature as conceived, philosophy is hallowed as a discipline that critically and rationally searching for the first principles and their ultimate implications for existence. Thus, without the advent of philosophy, existence and human existence would have been eclipsed by ignorance.

First and foremost, the idea of showing the distinction between animate, inanimate and meaning-seeking as well as meaning-making existents, is a philosophical one. Inferring from existence as a whole, what held sway regarding knowledge in the age of antiquity was mysticism, mythology, supernaturalism, religion and dogmatic beliefs. In the contemporary times, religion, supernaturalism (witchcraft, afterlife, death, reincarnation, superstition and belief, etc.), and many other events persists which defile scientific explanation just as laws of nature also are helpless in attempting some explanations. It is thus, philosophy as a broad system of knowledge that is able to advance meaningful explanations to these fundamental and wide spread ontological concerns. By such clarifications, philosophy helps in liberating humanity from the damning consequences of ignorance and superstition. By and large, philosophy provides a liberation effect to humanity such that humanity is not consumed by mysteries, superstition, anxiety and even supernaturalism. It would have been calamitous without philosophy; if not for philosophy, humanity would not have advanced beyond religious dogmas, mysticism, dogmatic beliefs and other encumbrances.

It has been earlier established that philosophy as a preoccupation with and a desire for the attainment of wisdom, articulates a systematic and clear vision of the world. By this, philosophy solicits for rational answers about the basic questions regarding ontology as well as, clamours for the attainment of the ultimate meaning of reality. In this preoccupation of philosophy, it provides a systematic and clear picture showing logical and important facts about reality. Furthermore, as a rational and critical activity, it abhors dogmatism and absolutism hence it systematically organises knowledge while, accordingly, providing justification for why and how (a) particular view(s) should take precedence over the other (s). This is to align with Plato that philosophical knowledge advances knowledge that is justified with conclusive evidence. Existence and human existence in want of philosophy would have at best, fantasised over these benefits.

Contemplative and reflective atmosphere; philosophy, moreover, provides a conducive atmosphere for reflection and contemplation. Considered as such, philosophy offers knowledge that is revelatory, informative and demystifying. Even at that, philosophy is not done, it is a pathfinder as it seeks to critically engage issues neglected or taken for granted by other branches of human intellectual endeavours. The freedom to allow the human mind to roam freely, takes an individual to the state of zest. Human being with the enablement of philosophy develops critical thought and imaginative abilities borne out of philosophical activities and deploys such towards the attainment of current understandings about existence and human existence. It is only philosophy that makes this possible.

Liberalisation of knowledge; as a discipline that is antithetic to

absolutism, philosophy brazenly, crassly, rationally and critically frowns at attempts to stifle human knowledge by any claim of absolute knowledge by an individual or group. Here, we recall the dark ages in the history of Western philosophy where the School Men or the Church Fathers alone, had the sole prerogative to making knowledge claims. However, credit must be given to the renaissance thinkers who succeeded in turning the table against the absolutists even though with a high price. The absolutism of the early Church, abundantly illustrates how existence and human existence would have been with philosophy on recess. Despite the success achieved by liberalising knowledge activities, some individuals (philosophers inclusive) and religious fundamentalists still exhibit abhorrence for philosophy and often times, cast aspersions on it. The rest of humanity would have been doomed by the privileged few if philosophy did not liberalised knowledge. Being liberal, philosophy as a discipline turns its searchlight even on itself, that is, philosophy as a critical disciple, questions itself by way of self-assessment of its activities and claims. This posture of philosophy clearly distinguishes it from other known intellectual endeavours. A knowledge system that scrutinises itself would have been unheard of except with the advent of philosophy.

More so, human existence divorced from philosophy, deprives human being the intellectual frameworks for appreciating and transforming realities of all kinds; socio-ontological, economic, political, legal, cultural, traditional and religious, etc. Indeed, by critiquing ideologies, philosophy invokes development as it challenges existing ideologies and show how they have become obsolete or deficient. For instance, philosophy accordingly, advances new ways of transforming human socio-economic and political structures for human and societal development.

Similarly, the privilege of new descriptions of what and who humans truly are, would have been clearly denied. Philosophy offers humanity critical rebuttals to counter stereotypes and denigrations especially to Africans. Eurocentric scholars have over the years denied the existence of African philosophy/African intelligence, cast aspersions of Africans, stereotyped and even demonised and dehumanised Africans. However, it took philosophy only to take a swipe on these fathom claims. Differently put, the non-availability of philosophy is ditto depriving humanity the opportunity to critically examine the ideas and values human beings live by. Indeed, it is philosophy that confers meaningful existence on all existents. Anything to the contrary, absolutely, infringes on the meaningful meaning of existence.

Conclusion

Philosophy is concerned with knowledge beyond the surface claims. That is why philosophy is preoccupied with the holistic nature of existence in order to determine the meaning and nature of existence regarding things that lie beneath the surface. It is premised on this endeavour that all human intellectual attempts in the diverse knowledge areas to arrive at the meaning of reality, are all, subsumed under philosophy as the first intellectual discipline that ever was. In other words, philosophy is the mother discipline to all the clamours for knowing or knowledge. In all its engagements, not minding whether it is pure philosophy or the off-springs of philosophy, philosophy demystifies and explains reality. It accounts for the why, what and how of knowledge. Thus, philosophy has a penchant for certainty/systematism. That is why it seeks for the meaning of existence and human existence. Mythology prior and subsequent knowledge spheres that branched out of philosophy have shown that they are incapable of providing

satisfactory and holistic intellectual contributions regarding knowledge. This is the case because, for instance, existence as ascribed to both physically observable phenomena as well as non-physically observable phenomena, is best made meaningful based on philosophical distinction. Philosophically, it is affirmed that some existents have fixed nature while human being is the only existent that is dynamic and meaning-making being. That is, it is a being that is conscious of its existence and other existents. This awareness is totally absent in the other existents.

Besides, other disciplines distinguish existents based on the category of animate and inanimate objects. No doubt, human being and other living things share the attribute of living things, however, humanity as an existent, is a being or animal that is distinguishable from other beings or animals by the attributes or categories of rationality, consciousness, self-projection, morality, meaning-making and ensoulment. It is accordingly considered as the only meaningful existence. Human existence refers to the existence of the human individual concretely with their experiences in space and time. By and large, all that is contained in human existence is subsumed under ontological realities. Thus, the main value of thinking about realities is that, it makes humanity reconsider new possibilities, exercise intellectual and imaginative abilities, and reflect on both life and customs as cherished. As Oladipo quips, philosophy provides the intellectual arsenals which are employed to debunk stereotypes, discriminations and dehumanisations, etc. Thus, apart from enabling the possibilities of evolving changes in human condition as a critical activity while philosophy is not on holiday, it consistently, prods humanity to be conscious of these and more. But once on recess, the opposite takes over. Summarily, meaningful existence and human existence is impossible devoid of

philosophy. Now, imagine the being of humanity with philosophy on holiday or in abeyance!

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