COURSE GUIDE

**DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY**
**FACULTY OF ARTS**
**NATONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA**

# Course Guide for PHL 101: Introduction to Philosophy

**Course Code** **PHL 101**

**Course Title** **Introduction to Philosophy**

Course Writer Prof. Francis Offor
Department of Philosophy
University of Ibadan (UI)
Ibadan, Nigeria

Course Editor Prof Jim Unah
Department of Philosophy
Faculty of Arts
University of Lagos (UNILAG)
Lagos, Nigeria

## Introduction

Welcome to **PHL 101: Introduction to Philosophy**. PHL 101 is a three-credit unit course that has a minimum duration of one semester. The course is compulsory for all B.A. philosophy degree students in the university. The course is meant to introduce students to what philosophy is, by providing students with knowledge of the basics of what characterises the discipline of philosophy. In other words, the Course will provide students with knowledge of what they need to know, so as to be at home with studying philosophy. To achieve this, students will be introduced to the language, style, features and method of philosophy as well as the various attempts at defining philosophy. The various branches of philosophy as well as the relationship between philosophy and other disciplines will be discussed. Issues in African philosophical tradition will be examined against the backdrop of what obtains in other philosophical traditions.

## Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Define philosophy, explain key concepts as well as identify essential features of the discipline of philosophy
- Explain the philosophical method and how it differs from the method of science
- Explain the relevance of philosophy to the individual who studies it; to other disciplines and to the society at large
- Identify and explain the various branches of philosophy and how philosophy is related to other disciplines.
- Discuss issues within the African philosophical tradition and
- Examine philosophical orientations in other traditions.

## Working through this Course

To successfully complete this course, read the study units, do all assessments, participate in discussion forums, read the recommended books/texts and other materials provided and participate in on-line facilitation.

Each study unit has introduction, intended learning outcomes, the main content, conclusion, summary, self-assessment exercise and references/further readings. The introduction will give an insight into what you should expect in the study unit. The intended learning outcomes pose questions that will prepare you for what you should be

able to do at the completion of each study unit. The main content provides a deeper analysis of issues discussed in each unit, while the summary is a recap of the issues discussed in the unit. The self-assessment exercise contain questions meant to test your understanding of topics taught in each unit. These questions will assist you to evaluate your learning at the end of each unit and to establish the extent to which you have achieved the intended learning outcomes. To meet the intended learning outcomes, knowledge is presented in text, arranged into modules and units. Click on the links as may be directed, but where you are reading the text offline, you will have to copy and paste the link address into a browser. You can also print and download the texts and save in your computer or external drive. Do not also forget to consult the texts recommended for further reading.

**Study Units**

**Module 1: Understanding Philosophy**
Unit 1: Meaning and nature of philosophy
Unit 2: Conceptions of philosophy
Unit 3: Features of philosophy
Unit 4: Method of philosophy

**Module 2: The Value of Philosophy**
Unit 1: The value of philosophy to the individual who studies it
Unit 2: The value of philosophy to other disciplines
Unit 3: The value of philosophy to the society
Unit 4: Prospects for philosophy

**Module 3: Philosophy and Other Disciplines**
Unit 1: The concern of philosophy with other disciplines
Unit 2: Philosophy of religion
Unit 3: Philosophy of science
Unit 4: Philosophy of the social sciences

**Module 4: Branches of Philosophy**
Unit 1: Metaphysics
Unit 2: Epistemology
Unit 3: Ethics
Unit 4: Logic
Unit 5: Social and Political Philosophy

**Module 5: African Philosophical tradition**
Unit 1: The Idea of African philosophy
Unit 2: Orientations in African philosophy

Unit 3: Issues in African philosophy
Unit 4: Sub-Disciplinary Focus on African Philosophy

**Module 6: Other Philosophical traditions**
Unit 1: Oriental philosophy
Unit 2: Islamic/Arabic philosophy
Unit 3: Continental philosophy
Unit 4: Africana philosophy

**References for Further Readings**


Anselm K. Jimoh, 2014. *Philosophy, A guide for Beginners.* Ibadan: Ebony Books & Kreations.

Grayling, A. C. 1995. *Philosophy 1, A guide Through the Subject.* Oxford: University Press.

Grayling, A. C. 1998. *Philosophy 2, Further Through the Subject.* Oxford: University Press.

Hospers, J. 1973. *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Noam Chomsky, 1979. *Language and Responsibility*, trans. by John Viertel. New York: Pantheon Books.

Donald Sherer, Peter A. Facione, Thomas Attig, and Fred D. Miller. 1979. *Introductory Philosophy*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall.

Joseph Margolis, 1968. *An Introduction to Philosophical Inquiry*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Pierre Hadot, 1995. *Philosophy as a Way of Life*. Ed. Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Michael Chase. Oxford: Blackwell.

Olusegun Oladipo, 2008. *Thinking About Philosophy, A General Guide*. Ibadan: Hope Publications.

Isaiah Berlin, 1978. "The Purpose of Philosophy," in his *Concepts and Categories*. London: The Hogarth Press.

Isaac E. Ukpokolo, 2015. *Methodology of Research and Writing in Philosophy: A Guide,* Ibadan: Kairos Publishing.

Martinich, A. P. 2005, *Philosophical Writing: An Introduction*, 3rd Edition, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Rippon, S. 2008. *A Brief Guide to Writing the Philosophy Paper,* Harvard: Harvard College Writing Centre Brief Guide Series.

Wiredu, K. 1980. *Philosophy and an African Culture,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

**Course Code:** **PHL 101**

**Course Title:** **Introduction to Philosophy**

**Course Developer:** **Prof. Francis Offor**
**Department of Philosophy**
**Faculty of Arts**

**University of Ibadan**
**Ibadan, Nigeria**

**Course Editor:** **Prof. Jim Unah**
**Department of Philosophy**
**Faculty of Arts**
**University of Lagos**
**Lagos, Nigeria**

# Module 1: Understanding Philosophy

## UNIT 1: MEANING AND NATURE OF PHILOSOPHY

**Contents**



### 1.0 Introduction

Welcome to this discussion on the meaning and nature of philosophy. By its very topic, you should realise that there are two parts that make-up our examination of philosophy here. There is the part on meaning, on the one hand, and there is the part of nature, on the other hand. Thus, we are going to deal with the meaning as well as the nature of what philosophy is. It is assumed that by now, you have heard of philosophy and perhaps, have been wondering what it is all about. The discussion in this unit is meant to introduce you to what philosophy is, by providing you with a knowledge of the basics of what characterises the discipline of philosophy. Let me even say that it is not just this unit that would introduce you to philosophy, the whole of the module will provide you with knowledge of what you need to know, so as to be at home with studying philosophy.

### 2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define philosophy
- explain key concepts in philosophy
- identify essential characteristics of philosophy

## 3.0 Main Content

The content of this unit will be examined in the following headings: (i) the meaning of philosophy; and (ii) the nature of philosophy. In examining the meaning of philosophy, we would look at some approaches to the definition of philosophy. These will include the historical approach, as well as an approach that sees philosophy as the analysis of language. As regards the nature of philosophy, we would look at philosophy as a set of questions and answers, philosophy as criticism, and philosophy as a program of change.

## 3.1 The Meaning of Philosophy

Let me begin by saying that the task of defining philosophy is not much different from that of defining any discipline. By this, I mean that it is often the experience that for a discipline with the character and history as philosophy, there would be as many definitions as there are experts in the discipline. With this said, from etymology, the word philosophy is a combination of two Greek words, *Philo* (meaning love) and *Sophia* (meaning wisdom). When conjoined, philosophy then becomes the love of wisdom and a philosopher, a lover of wisdom. In ancient times, a lover of wisdom could be related to any area where intelligence was expressed.

This could be in business, politics, human relations, or carpentry and other skills. In this sense, philosophy was used to describe the whole of life in antiquity. In contrast to this, some modern definitions restrict philosophy to what can be known by science or the analysis of language. So, as used originally by the ancient Greeks, the term "philosophy" meant the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, and comprised all areas of speculative thought, including the arts, sciences and religion.

In today's intellectual society, there is a popular use of the word philosophy. Philosophy is a term applied to almost any area of life. Some questions may express this general attitude: what is your philosophy of business? banking? driving a car? or your philosophy of the use of money? If this popular use of the word were to prevail, one may admit that anyone who thinks seriously about any subject is a philosopher. If this general definition is accepted, then everyone rightly qualifies to become a philosopher, but this would be ignoring the understanding of philosophy in the strict, technical and professional sense as academic disciplines or study.

Put differently, If this loose definition prevails, it would mean that a philosopher is anyone who says he is a philosopher. Because of this inadequacy, it becomes apparent that we have to look elsewhere for a definition of philosophy. And so, because the original meaning of the word, philosophy, does not give us much for specific content, we will turn to descriptive definitions. A descriptive definition of philosophy is such that it seeks to describe its functions, goals, and reasons for existence. In the following pages, a number of these definitions will be set forth and examined.

But let me reiterate what I said earlier regarding having as many definitions as there are philosophers. This would come as a note of caution to the student who is just beginning to have first contact with philosophy. The beginner may despair over diverse definitions. Students who come from a scientific background frequently expect concise, clear, and universally accepted definitions. This will not be true in philosophy and it is also not universally true concerning all issues in any science or non-scientific study or discipline. The diversity of opinion in philosophy becomes a source of embarrassment for the beginner when asked to explain to parents or unknowing friends, just what a course in philosophy is all about. It might naturally be expected that philosophy, being one of the oldest disciplines or subjects in academia, should achieve some uniformity or opinion in terms of definition, but this is not exactly the case.

Yet, in spite of diversity of opinions, philosophy is important. Plato declared that philosophy is a gift the gods have bestowed on mortals.[1] This may reflect man's ability to reason about the world as well as man's life within it. Socrates' famous statement, "Know thyself," reflects this aim of philosophy. Plato also warned against the neglect of philosophy. He wrote that "land animals came from men who had no use for philosophy. . . ."[2] In light of this, it might help to inform you that men live by philosophies.

### 3.1.1 The Historical Approach

Remember our question: what is philosophy? According to the historical approach, philosophy is the study of historical figures who are considered philosophers. One may encounter the names of Thales, Philo, Plotinus, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Don Scotus Erigena, Immanuel Kant, David Hume, Karl Marx, Georg Wilhelm Fredrick Hegel, Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and many more. All these are known philosophers. But one may ponder as to what actually holds them together within the philosophical bracket, since they are so diverse in many of their views? One answer lies in their common set of problems and concerns. Many were interested in the problems of the universe: its nature and origin; the issue of man's existence, good and evil, politics, and other topics.

The argument for the historical approach is that no real understanding of philosophy can be had unless one understands the past. Philosophy would be impoverished if it lost any of the names above. Some argue that knowing the history of philosophy is required for a positive appreciation of philosophy, and necessary if one is to make creative contributions to the advancement of philosophy.

This definition of philosophy has its problems: (i) it tends to limit philosophy to the great minds of the past and makes it an elitist movement, (ii) it restricts philosophy to an examination of past questions and answers only, (iii) it is not really different from the study of history of ideas. This would make philosophy a sub-unit of history.

---

[1] Trans. H.D.P. Lee, *Timaeus* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 64.

[2] Trans. H.D.P. Lee, *Timaeus*, p. 121.

The value of the historical approach is that it introduces the student to the great minds of the past and the confrontation one has with philosophic problems that are raised by thinking people in all ages. This is desirable in itself even though this is not the best definition of philosophy.

The history of thought shows that philosophers are always concerned with, or motivated by, life's fundamental questions, or what is sometimes referred to as the 'Big Questions', such as: How should we live? Is there free will? How do we know anything? What is real? or, What is truth? While philosophers do not agree among themselves on either the range of proper philosophical questions or the proper methods of answering them, they do agree that merely expressing one's personal opinions on controversial topics like these is not doing philosophy.

Rather, philosophers insist on first attaining clarity about the exact question being asked, and then providing answers supported by clear and logically structured arguments.[3] Such well-constructed and logically structured arguments are meant to primarily analyse and critique such fundamental questions and the ideas we live by in every facets of our existence. Philosophy is thus a critical and rational activity concerned with the most fundamental questions of human existence and an analysis of usually taken-for-granted worldviews, beliefs, knowledge claims and ideas about human existence.

Hence core philosophical activity is summed up in three questions: What is real (the metaphysical/ontological concern)? How do we know (the epistemological concern)? What is the moral life (the axiological/moral concern)?[4]

### 3.1.2 Philosophy as the Analysis of Language

This is one of the more extreme definitions of philosophy. This definition began as an emphasis in philosophy at the beginning of the 20th century. A growing revolt took place against the metaphysical systems in philosophy. Metaphysical systems in philosophy explained everything from the standpoint of a great idea like 'mind' or 'spirit.' The reaction was primarily against the philosophy of idealism which is a highly developed metaphysical philosophy. The analysis-of-language-emphasis rejected metaphysics and accepted the simple, but useful modern standard of scientific verification.

Their central thesis is that only truths of logic and empirically verifiable statements are meaningful. What does scientific verification mean in this context? If you can validate or reproduce an experiment or whatever, you can say it is true. If there is no way to

[3] Simon Rippon, *A Brief Guide to Writing the Philosophy Paper* (Harvard: Harvard College Writing Centre Brief Guide Series, 2008), p. 1.

[4] See Randall Koetting and Mark Mallisa, "Philosophy Research and Education," In D. Jonassen (Ed.), *Handbook of Research in Educational Communications and Technology* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Laurence Erlbaum Associates, 2004), p. 1011.

reproduce or validate the experiment in the context of science, there was then no claim for truth. How do verification and language work together?

Try this example. How do you know when to take a statement as referring to a fact? We can use three sentences: (i) God is love, (ii) Abuja is in Nigeria, and (iii) love is wonderful. These sentences are constructed in a similar manner. But only one is factual, in that it can be scientifically verified. Many people travel every day to Abuja and anyone who doubts can go see for himself. But you cannot scientifically verify that love is wonderful, and that God is love. I can say factually that I love a person and may even witness events that point to this, but how can I verify the word "wonderful"? God is not seen and love is not seen scientifically. Are these statements meaningful?

The conclusion reached by the philosophers (known as analytic philosophers) who champion the language approach is that anything not verifiable is nonsense. All of the systems of the past that go beyond verification are to be rejected as nonsense. This means that the realm of values, religion, aesthetics, and much of philosophy is regarded only as emotive statements. An emotive statement reflects only how a person "feels" about a topic. Declaring that love is wonderful is only to declare that I feel it is wonderful. I may seek your agreement on the issue, but again it is not an objective truth, but two "feelings" combined.

Other analytic philosophers moved beyond the limitations of the verification principle to the understanding of language itself. Instead of talking about the world and whether things exist in the world, they talk about the words that are used to describe the world. This exercise in "semantic ascent" may be seen in contrasting talk about miles, distances, points, etc., with talk about the word "mile" and how it is used. Language philosophers such as W. V. O. Quine spend entire treatises on the nature of language, syntax, synonymous terms, concepts of abstractions, translation of terms, vagueness and other features of language. This is a philosophy about language rather than being interested in great issues that have frequently troubled the larger tradition of philosophers.

It is important to state at this point, that language analysis as the definition of philosophy, changes philosophy from being a subject matter into a tool for dealing with other subject matters. It becomes a method without content.

This definition is as one-sided as the definition is rejected. The analysis of language has been an important part of philosophy from the time of Socrates and others to the present. But language connected with verification and restricted by that principle places great limitations on areas that philosophy has often regarded as important. This limitation is seen particularly in the areas of morals and ethics. Morality cannot be verified in a scientific way. But it does seem obvious that we can discuss actions and adopt some means of objective evaluation in terms of reason.

Moreover, it does not seem obvious that some moral distinctions are merely "emotive feelings." It appears quite reasonable and acceptable to most people that there is a big difference between paddling a child by a concerned parent, and the child-abusing parent

whose discipline kills the helpless child. If verification is required for the statement – it is wrong to kill the child – then all moral standards are at an end, and philosophy is turned into non-meaning-making activity.

At its simplest, philosophy is the study of knowledge, or "thinking about thinking", although the breadth of what it covers is perhaps best illustrated by a selection of other alternative definitions given below:

- Philosophy is the discipline concerned with questions of how one should live (ethics); what sorts of things exist and what are their essential natures (metaphysics); what counts as genuine knowledge (epistemology); and what are the correct principles of reasoning (logic).
- Philosophy is an investigation of the nature, causes, or principles of reality, knowledge, or values, based on logical reasoning rather than empirical methods (*American Heritage Dictionary*).
- Philosophy is the study of the ultimate nature of existence, reality, knowledge and goodness, as discoverable by human reasoning (*Penguin English Dictionary*)
- Philosophy is the rational investigation of questions about existence and knowledge and ethics (*WordNet*)
- Philosophy is the search for knowledge and truth, especially about the nature of man and his behaviour and beliefs (*Kernerman English Multilingual Dictionary*)
- Philosophy is the rational and critical inquiry into basic principles (*Microsoft Encarta Encyclopaedia*)
- Philosophy is the study of the most general and abstract features of the world and categories with which we think: mind, matter, reason, proof, truth, etc. (*Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*)
- Philosophy is the careful thought about the fundamental nature of the world, the grounds for human knowledge, and the evaluation of human conduct (*The Philosophy Pages*)

## 3.2 The Nature of Philosophy

In this sub-section, we would examine the nature of philosophy under the headings of (i) philosophy as a set of questions and answers, (ii) philosophy as a programme of change and (iii) philosophy as a criticism. To be sure, these do not exhaust how the nature of philosophy may be conceived and understood. They only provide some basic in-roads for describing the nature of philosophy.

### 3.2.1 Philosophy as a Set of Questions and Answers

There is a long list of topics philosophy is interested in. Some of these are more interesting and up-to-date than others. Is the world of one or more substances? Is it

matter, mind, or other? Is man only a body? Is he, or does he have a soul? Does God exist? Many other questions could be incorporated here. Some of these questions have several proposed solutions, while others cannot be answered decisively. For example, the question: Does God exist? can only be answered in terms of a probability situation, as no scientific proof can decide the question either way. Some questions have been answered to the satisfaction of many philosophers for a long period of time only to be raised again. One example of this is the old question of Socrates' days about man being born with knowledge, called innate knowledge. For centuries, this was accepted by a variety of people. But John Locke seems to have solved the matter for many philosophers that man is not given innate ideas at birth. Hence, he must gain his knowledge through experience.

Now in contemporary thought, Noam Chomsky has raised the question again in proposing what he calls "generative grammar." He rejects the view of Locke that language is learned empirically. When we learn a language, we are able to understand and formulate all types of sentences that we have never heard before. This ability to deal with language is regarded by Chomsky as innate, something we have inherited genetically. So, the issue comes anew.[5]

But other questions have not met with the same successful responses for such a long period of time. However, it may be argued that describing the nature of philosophy as a set of questions and answers is not unique by any means, as other disciplines or studies could also be described by the questions they seek to answer.

If this description will be accepted as integral to the nature of philosophy, then it is important to set forth the particular kinds of questions that are restricted to the description of the nature of philosophy. Obviously, the answers to the problem of pollution are not the kinds of questions one deals with in philosophy. But the relation of man's body to his mind is one of the kinds of questions that philosophers have regarded as their own.

Philosophical questions (unlike those of the sciences) are usually foundational and abstract in nature. Philosophy is done primarily through reflection and does not tend to rely on experiment, although the methods used to study it may be analogous to those used in the study of the natural sciences. In common usage, it sometimes carries the sense of unproductive or frivolous musings, but over the centuries it has produced some of the most important original thought, and its contribution to politics, sociology, mathematics, science and literature has been inestimable.

Although the study of philosophy may not yield "the meaning of life, the universe and everything", many philosophers believe that it is important that each of us examines such questions and even that an unexamined life is not worth living. It also provides a good way of learning to think more clearly about a wide range of issues, and its methods of analysing arguments can be useful in a variety of situations in other areas of life.

[5] See Noam Chomsky, *Language and Responsibility*, trans. by John Viertel (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979)

### 3.2.2 Philosophy as a Program of Change

Karl Marx declared that the role of philosophy is not to think about the world, but to change it. Philosophy is not to be an ivory tower enterprise without relevance to the world of human conditions. A contemporary Marxist has asked:

> What is the point in subtle epistemological investigation when science and technology, not unduly worried about the foundations of their knowledge, increase daily their mastery of nature and man? What is the point of linguistic analysis which steers clear of the transformation of language (ordinary language!) into an instrument of political control? What is the point in philosophical reflections on the meaning of good and evil when Auschwitz, the Indonesian massacres, and the war in Vietnam provides a definition which suffocates all discussion of ethics? And what is the point in further philosophical occupation with Reason and Freedom when the resources and the features of a rational society, and the need for liberation are all too clear, and the problem is not their concept, but the political practice of their realization? [6]

The criticism of Herbert Marcuse is a stinging one. But the question of change is not one for philosophy *per se*. Philosophy has no built-in demand that can be the end product of one's thinking. It seems natural that one who is thinking seriously about the problems of man should seek good solutions. It seems natural also that one having good solutions should seek to carry them out. But it is also possible for one to have good solutions and only contemplate them without any action. There is no inherent mandate in philosophy for a program of action, although it may be tacitly assumed that some good action will come forth.

Philosophy is in contrast generally to a movement like Christianity which has a built-in motivation for changing the world by the conversion of people to its cause. Traditional philosophy has concerned itself more with academic questions. But there is the underlying assumption: if you know what is right and good, you will proceed to do it.

Another view of philosophy with an emphasis on doing, or change, is that of Alan Watts. Watts describes philosophy from the standpoint of contemplation and meditation. He starts with the conclusion of the language philosophers: all language about philosophy is meaningless. If this is true, then philosophy should be silent and learn to practice oriental mysticism which is characterized as "idealess contemplation."[7]

According to this view, the aim of meditation is to get to the Ground of Being. What is the Ground of Being? In a simple way, it can be described as the all-pervasive Spirit that

---

[6] Herbert Marcuse, "The Relevance of Reality," in *The Owl of Minerva*, edited by Charles J. Bontempt, and S. Jack Odell (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1975)

[7] Alan Watts, "Philosophy Beyond Words," in *The Owl of Minerva*, p. 197.

is the only basic reality of the world. Everyone is part of the Great Spirit. The aim of philosophy is not to think, but to achieve union with the Great Spirit.

The idea of change is different between Marcuse and Watts. The Marxist idea of change is to change the material world and man will be better. Watt's view of change is to forsake social change for all change is futile. The real change is to attain oneness with the impersonal world-soul. The world of the material is transient, and the visible world is not the real world. Even the Ground of Being, or the Great Pervasive Spirit is changing and manifesting itself in various forms. There is a subtle contradiction in Watt's philosophy. The Ground of Being continues to produce human beings who must continually deny their own being to be able to return to the Ground of Being. This denial of one's own being reflects the fact that the Ground of Being is constantly making a bad thing come into being.

Another variation on the theme of mystic contemplation – the attempt to attain oneness with God – is seen in the thought of men such as M. Eckhart and Plotinus. Their philosophy encourages a contemplative role. While Eckhart and Plotinus are motivated from a religious or quasi-religious motive like Watts, they do not promote the revolutionary social change as advocated by the Marxists.

### 3.2.3 Philosophy as a Criticism

The idea of philosophy being "criticism" may be explained or understood by looking at one of the philosophers who embodied this understanding of the nature of philosophy. Socrates is one of the earliest to engage in philosophic criticism. For Socrates, criticism referred to critical thinking involving a *dialectic* in the conversation. A dialectic, one must keep in mind, is a running debate with claims, counter-claims, qualifications, corrections, and compromises in the sincere hope of getting to understand a concept.

This may be seen briefly in Plato's *Republic* (Bk. I). Socrates asked Cephalus what his greatest blessing of wealth had been. Cephalus replied that a sense of justice had come from it. Socrates then asked: what is justice? The conversation then involved several people including Thrasymachus who claimed that justice was a mere ploy of the strong to keep the weak in line. Socrates rejected the tyrant-theory as irrational and the dialectic went on in pursuit of the question: what is justice?

Criticism is the attempt to clear away shabby thinking and establish concepts with greater precision and meaning. In this sense, John Dewey noted that:

> philosophy is inherently criticism, having its distinctive position among various modes of criticism in its generality; a criticism of criticism as it were. Criticism is discriminating judgement, careful appraisal, and judgement is appropriately termed criticism wherever the subject-matter of discrimination concerns goods or values.[8]

[8] John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, p. 39.

Another example of criticism is the philosophic movement associated with the name of Edmund Husserl who is the father of phenomenology. Phenomenology is a method of criticism aiming to investigate the essence of anything. The essence of love, justice, courage, and any other idea may be dealt with critically, and a tentative conclusion reached. Such criticism is vital to philosophy as well as to other disciplines.

Criticism must not be confused with scepticism. Scepticism as an idea connotes a critical spirit. It is the tendency of not being easily satisfied with simple or superficial evidence and striving to accept only incorrigible beliefs that are absolutely certain. The sceptics strive to establish that there is the need to cast doubt on the existence of all things if that is not possible, then we can affirm that objective knowledge is unattainable. On the other hand, criticism is carried on for the pursuit of purer, or better knowledge. Sometimes scepticism may be viewed as a stepping stone to knowledge. Unfortunately, scepticism frequently degenerates to irresponsible negativism. When this happens, scepticism becomes a wilful, self-serving activity rather than the pursuit of knowledge.

Criticism as the activity of philosophy has been fairly popular in the contemporary scene. Robert Paul Wolff describes philosophy as the activity of careful reasoning with clarity and logical rigor controlling it. Such an activity has strong faith in the power of reason, and it is an activity in which reason leads to truth.[9]

Similarly, Donald Scherer, Peter Facione, Thomas Attig, and Fred D. Miller, in their *Introduction to Philosophy*, describe philosophy as beginning with an attitude of wonder. Philosophical wonder "leads to serious reflection on the more fundamental or more general questions that emerge in a variety of particular cases."[10] This sense of wonder leads to activities in which one raises questions concerning the meaning of terms, the attempt to think things through systematically, and comprehensively, to have good reasoning in the thought process, and then evaluate various options.

Joseph Margolis suggests that doing philosophy is an art and philosophers pursue their creative work in different ways. Studying philosophers of the past is done for the purpose of analysing the ways they sought to deal with philosophical problems. Consequently, there is no prevailing way of working, to which professionals everywhere are more or less committed.[11] Milton K. Munitz suggests that "philosophy is a quest for a view of the world and of man's place in it, which is arrived at and supported in a critical and logical way."[12] Following this:

---

[9] Donald Sherer, Peter A. Facione, Thomas Attig, and Fred D. Miller, *Introductory Philosophy*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1979.

[10] Donald Sherer, Peter A. Facione, Thomas Attig, and Fred D. Miller, *Introduction to Philosophy*, p. 8.

[11] Joseph Margolis, *An Introduction to Philosophical Inquiry* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), p. 8.

[12] *The Ways of Philosophy*, (New York: MacMillan, 1979), p. 10.

> . . . philosophy is a radical critical inquiry into the fundamental assumptions of any field of inquiry, including itself. We are not only able to have a philosophy of religion, but also a philosophy of education, a philosophy of art (aesthetics), of psychology, of mathematics, of language, and so forth. We can also apply the critical focus of philosophy to any human concern. There can be a philosophy of power, of sexuality, freedom, community, revolution – even a philosophy of sports. Finally, philosophy can reflect upon itself; that is, we can do a philosophy of philosophy. Philosophy can, then, examine its own presuppositions, its own commitments.[13]

Criticism as a description of the nature of philosophy makes it such that philosophy is taken as a method of going about thinking rather than the content of the subject. Criticism will help one acquire a philosophy of life, but criticism is not the philosophy itself. Generally, when one asks about philosophy, the intention relates to a subject matter rather than a method of approach. This would make it possible for all critical thinkers on any critical topic to regard themselves as doing philosophy.

## 4.0 Conclusion

The thoughtful reader has now probably come to the conclusion: a single and universal definition of philosophy is nearly impossible. Another may say: why can't all of these be used for a definition? The idea of pooling the best element of each definition – known as eclecticism – has a certain appeal. That is, there is some truth in an eclectic approach to defining philosophy. In this vein, philosophy would not be the same without criticism; no philosopher worth his salt would consider an important discussion without resorting to an analysis of the language; and neither is it strange to see a philosopher attempting to put his beliefs in practice so as to bring about some positive change. All of these may help the beginning student to understand the meaning and nature of the discipline of philosophy

## 5.0 Summary

The lecture began with the attempt to provide the meaning of philosophy by examining the etymology (root words) of philosophy. In this sense, it was shown that philosophy refers to the "love of wisdom". Wisdom here describes the way of life that is grounded on the idea of practical wisdom; not just conceptual or theoretical wisdom, so to speak. Our discussion of the nature of philosophy further in the unit prompted us to examine philosophy as a set of questions and answers; philosophy as a programme of change and philosophy as criticism. In all, philosophy represents the attempt to understand the world by asking fundamental questions that bother on the human condition.

[13] Paula Struhl and Karsten Struhl, *Philosophy Now* (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 5.

## 6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

i. Distinguish between Philosophy in the popular sense and Philosophy in the strict technical sense.
ii. Briefly explain the Historical Approach to the understanding of Philosophy.
iii. To what extent can we describe Philosophy as set of questions and answers, a programme of change and as criticism?

## 7.0 References/Further Reading


Anselm K. Jimoh, 2014. *Philosophy, A guide for Beginners.* Ibadan: Ebony Books & Kreations.

Grayling, A. C. 1995. *Philosophy 1, A guide Through the Subject.* Oxford: University Press.

Grayling, A. C. 1998. *Philosophy 2, Further Through the Subject.* Oxford: University Press.

Hospers, J. 1973. *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis.* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Simon Rippon, 2008. *A Brief Guide to Writing the Philosophy Paper.* Harvard: Harvard College Writing Centre Brief Guide Series.

Noam Chomsky, 1979. *Language and Responsibility*, trans. by John Viertel. New York: Pantheon Books.

Alan Watts, 1975. "Philosophy Beyond Words," in *The Owl of Minerva*, Edited by Charles J. Bontempt, and S. Jack Odell. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co.

Donald Sherer, Peter A. Facione, Thomas Attig, and Fred D. Miller. 1979. *Introductory* , Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall.

Joseph Margolis, 1968. *An Introduction to Philosophical Inquiry*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Paula Struhl and Karsten Struhl, 1972. *Philosophy Now*. New York: Random House.

## UNIT 2: CONCEPTIONS OF PHILOSOPHY

**Contents**



### 1.0 Introduction

This discussion on the conception of philosophy is meant to introduce you to a number of basic perspectives to how philosophy may be conceived. By its very topic, there are, at least, three ways by which we may conceive of philosophy. Conceiving philosophy in these ways helps us provide broad understanding of the discipline of philosophy. For instance, one sense in which the notion of philosophy is employed is in relation to an individual's general attitude towards life and relationships – attitudes grounded on certain guiding principles. And so, the discussion in this unit is meant to introduce you to what philosophy is, by providing you with broad conception of what characterises the discipline of philosophy. Let me say, as indicated in the first unit of this module, that this unit is meant to further introduce you to philosophy; it is meant to provide you with broader knowledge of what you need to know, so as to be at home with studying philosophy.

### 2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Identify a number of conceptions of philosophy
- Explain, at least, two of these conceptions of philosophy
- Highlight essential characteristics of these conceptions of philosophy

### 3.0 Main Content

The conceptions of philosophy to be discussed as the content of this unit will be examined under the following heading: (i) philosophy as a worldview; (ii) philosophy as a way of life; and (iii) philosophy as a discipline. In examining these conceptions of

philosophy, it is pertinent to state that these do not exhaust all available perspectives of conceiving philosophy.

### 3.1 Philosophy as a Worldview (Weltanschaüung)

Let us begin by stating that early Greek philosophers attempted to describe the world in its simple make-up. One of such early Greek philosophers was Thales. He asserted that water was the important material (primary stuff) of the universe, from which all things came. For him, water can, at least, assume the three basic states of all things – liquid, solid (as ice) and gaseous (as vapour). In a similar vein, there have been many other proposals from other philosophers. But the main issue concerns the nature of the universe. A worldview, or *Weltanschaüung* as the Germans term it, involves more than the question of the universe. A worldview is the attempt to come to a total outlook of the universe as it relates to the make-up of matter, man, God, the right, the nature of politics, values, aesthetics, and any other element in the cosmos that is important.

A worldview, will therefore include views on man, social responsibilities and politics amongst others. In fact, any discipline or study having a bearing on the meaning of man will have relevance for a worldview. This will include biology, anthropology, psychology, sociology, theology, and other related disciplines. A worldview is an attempt to think coherently about the world in its completeness.

Such understanding of worldview may be seen to underlie James categorisation of philosophy as:

> The principles of explanation that underlie all things without exception, the elements common to gods and men and animals and stone, the first whence and the last whither of the whole cosmic procession, the conditions of all knowing, and the most general rules of human action – these furnish the problems commonly deemed philosophic par excellence; and the philosopher is the man who finds the most to say about them.[14]

It is imperative to note that there are many worldviews that are contrary to one another. Look at the following brief examples: (i) Lucretius, in his essay on nature, developed a worldview based on the atomic nature of all things.[15] Everything that is, is atomic. Even the souls of men and gods are composed of atoms. When atoms disintegrate, things, souls, and gods also disintegrate. Only atoms are permanent. Lucretius dealt with many other facts of existence, but they are all related to the atomic nature of things.

[14] W. James, *Some Problems of Philosophy* (New York: Longman, Green, and Co., 1911), p. 5.

[15] Lucretius, *The Nature of the Universe* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1951)

In contrast to the simple atomism of Lucretius is the (ii) philosophy of Hegel which views all reality from the standpoint of mind, or Absolute Spirit.[16] Spirit is the only reality. What looks like matter is really a sub-unit of Spirit. Hegel interpreted politics, the world, and man from the single vantage point of Spirit or Mind. A worldview that sort of stands at the mid-point or hybrid between (i) and (ii) above would be the philosophy of realism which asserts that mind and matter are both equally real. Matter is not mind, nor is mind merely matter in a different form. Samuel Alexander's book, *Space, Time, and Deity*, give an example of this third viewpoint.[17]

The three examples above are attempts at worldviews. Neither example is compatible with the other. Neither thinker would accept the other's views. But all are seeking explanations of human existence that result in worldviews.

The modern era of philosophy – since the turn of the 20th century – has seen considerable rejection of the worldview conception of philosophy. In spite of this rejection, it has a time-honoured tradition behind it. Aristotle has a sentence that is widely quoted about this emphasis:

> There is a science which investigates being as being, and the attributes which belong to this in virtue of its own nature. Now this is not the same as any of the so-called special sciences, for none of these treats universally of being as being. They cut off a part of being and investigate the attribute of this part.[18]

This conception of philosophy provides an integrated view of philosophy that makes it such that looking at the universe as a whole involves questions which cannot be ignored or isolated one from another but should be put together to form an integrated whole, or total view of the world..

In short, the purpose of philosophy, seen as a worldview, is to guide human life; it is to ensure that the journey of life is not undertaken without a sense of direction and discretion.

Conceiving philosophy as a world-view sounds good, but it too has problems. One basic criticism is that the systems of philosophers – Lucretius, Hegel, and others – have been limited by the basic motif, or guiding principle that is adopted. The principle is too limited and when applied, it makes a mockery out of some areas of human existence. For example, Lucretius' materialism or atomism is true to some extent, but it makes a mockery out of mind and is inconsistent with freedom or denies it. Other limitations exist in other worldviews. To put it positively, a world-view should be based on the best possible models, principles, or motifs. They are however not established dogmas, but

---

[16] Cf. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind* (New York: Harper Torch book, 1967)

[17] Cf. Samuel Alexander, *Space, Time, and Deity*, vol. 2 (New York: Dover Publications, 1966)

[18] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1003a 18-25.

should be set forth tentatively, as existential challenges and changes may require their revision from time to time.

## 3.2 Philosophy as a Way of Life

Let me begin by saying that the phrase 'Philosophy as a Way of Life' is closely associated with the French philosopher and researcher of ancient philosophy Pierre Hadot, whose work gained prominence in the English-speaking world in 1995 with the publication of a book called *Philosophy as a Way of Life*.[19] In the chapter from which the volume gets its title, Hadot claims that in antiquity "philosophy was a *way of life*," a "mode of existing-in-the-world, which had to be practiced at each instant, and the goal of which was to transform the whole of the individual's life."[20]

Philosophy was conceived as a love of wisdom, and wisdom, Hadot says, "does not merely cause us to know: it makes us 'be' in a different way."[21] Hadot goes on to illustrate the ways in which a wide range of ancient philosophers presented the task of philosophy as something therapeutic, something aimed at overcoming mental disturbances so that the practitioner can attain some kind of inner tranquillity. Hadot contrasts this with philosophy as it is usually practised today: "Ancient philosophy proposed to mankind an art of living. By contrast, modern philosophy appears above all as the construction of a technical jargon reserved for specialists."[22] Having said that, Hadot also refers to a number of post-antique philosophers whom he thinks still hold on to this ancient conception of philosophy. He suggests that both Rene Descartes and Baruch Spinoza held on to this way of thinking about philosophy, as did Schopenhauer and Frederick Nietzsche, and Hadot thinks that it is no coincidence that none of these thinkers held university positions.[23]

The important point in the present context is that this is not only how philosophy was once conceived long ago, but also a live metaphilosophical option that has been taken up by philosophers throughout the history of philosophy and can still be taken up today. But what does the expression, "Philosophy as a way of life," imply? It may be taken to involve the following things: first, that the ultimate motivation of philosophy is to transform one's way of life; second, that there ought to be some connection and consistency between someone's stated philosophical ideas and their behaviour; and third that actions are ultimately more philosophically significant than words.

---

[19] Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*. Ed. Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995)

[20] Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, p. 265.

[21] Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, p. 265.

[22] Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, p. 272.

[23] Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, pp. 271-272.

In this vein, philosophy may be seen to resonate with what Isaiah Berlin called "the power of ideas," that is, the ability of philosophy to transform the life of an individual, or even an entire society.[24] As he puts it, the concepts and categories with which people think "must deeply affect their lives."[25] One of the best definitions of "Philosophy as a Way of Life," can be found in Friedrich Nietzsche's *Schopenhauer as Educator*:

> I attach importance to a philosopher only to the extent that he is capable of setting an example. ... The philosopher must supply this example in his visible life, and not merely in his books; that is, it must be presented in the way the philosophers of Greece taught, through facial expressions, demeanour, clothing, food, and custom more than through what they said, let alone what they wrote.[26]

Or, as he puts it a little later on in the same work, "the only possible criticism of any philosophy, and the only one that proves anything, is trying to see if one can live by this philosophy."[27] This Nietzschean image was taken up by Michel Foucault when he wrote, "couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life?"[28]

If we go back to ancient Greek philosophy, we read in Plato's *Apology*, Socrates' saying that his principal concern is a desire to live a philosophical life.[29] This is implicit throughout the text but there are a few passages that stand out. The first of these is when Socrates tries to describe his philosophical mission. He presents it as a duty to *live* as a philosopher, examining himself and others.[30] Later, in response to his accusers who have condemned him to death, he says, "you have brought about my death in the belief that through it you will be delivered from submitting the conduct of your *lives* to criticism."[31]

This idea that the task at hand is to examine lives is repeated in another passage where he says that the best thing anyone can do is to examine themselves and others, adding that a

---

[24] See Isaiah Berlin, "The Purpose of Philosophy," in his *Concepts and Categories* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1978), pp. 1-11.

[25] Ibid. p.10

[26] *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche 2: Unfashionable Observations*. Trans. Richard T. Gray (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 183-84.

[27] Ibid. p.246.

[28] Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," in *The Foucault Reader*. Ed. Paul Rabinow (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 350.

[29] John Sellars, 'Plato's *Apology of Socrates*, A Metaphilosophical Text', *Philosophy and Literature* 38 (2014), 433-45.

[30] Plato, *Apology* 28e.

[31] Plato, *Apology*, 39c.

*life* without this sort of examination is not worth living.[32] For Socrates, then, philosophy is an activity directed at trying to figure out how to live well, subjecting our current way of life to examination. This of course leads to a desire to *know* various things and attempts to define various things, not least what is good and what is not good, but the motivation, even if it remains implicit, is clear: Socrates wants to find out how to live well – and not just for the sake of knowing how to live well, but because above all else, he actually wants to live well, to enjoy a good life, whatever that might turn out to be.

This remains the motivation throughout the early Socratic dialogues. In the *Gorgias*, for instance, Socrates insists on the seriousness of their discussion by reminding his interlocutors that it is about "what course of life is best."[33]

It seems, then, that we have a clear metaphilosophical division between Socrates and Aristotle. Both are committed to the pursuit of knowledge and both offer an image of an ideal life involving the pursuit of knowledge, but nevertheless, there is a clear difference when we turn to their ultimate motivations. Socrates pursues knowledge *in order* to live a philosophical life, while Aristotle lives a philosophical life *in order* to pursue knowledge. This is a subtle but, I think, important difference.

Aristotle's scientific image of philosophy is a disinterested pursuit of knowledge for its own sake; Socrates' humanistic image of philosophy is concerned with what it means to be human and how to live a good human life. The subsequent history of Western philosophy has seen both of these conceptions of philosophy flourish at different times, sometimes in combination, and sometimes apart.

In the light of what we have discussed so far, we might now point to three distinct views about philosophy as a way of life. These are:

1. The claim that philosophy as a way of life is a distinct tradition within Western philosophy, different in form and motivation from both analytic and continental philosophy, dominant in antiquity and present ever since, albeit marginalized in recent times.
2. The claim that philosophy as a way of life is a humanistic approach to philosophy, to be contrasted with a scientific approach and, as such, perhaps sharing more in common with the works of some continental philosophers than it does with most analytic philosophers.
3. The claim that philosophy as a way of life is one pole inherent to all philosophy, sometimes marginalized but always present to a greater or lesser extent.

A further consideration to be made here concerns whether we may do philosophy in order to transform our lives, or in order to comprehend the world? Following Stern's view that all really good philosophy does both, we may say that the notion of Philosophy as a Way

[32] Plato, *Apology*, 38a.

[33] Plato, *Gorgias* 500c

of Life involves the claim that the ultimate motivation is the Socratic: one to transform one's life; with the caveat, as Stern points out, that for this to be philosophy at all, that motivation cannot be at the expense of a commitment to the truth, for that is part of what makes it philosophy.

Stern's account has a lot to recommend it. All really good philosophy worthy of the name, takes seriously the central idea of Philosophy as a Way of Life, but never at the expense of the desire to understand the world as it is. This means that it cannot be merely a project aimed at making us feel good, because truths can sometimes be uncomfortable. In short, if we want to think of philosophy as something engaged, practical, and life changing, we need to be careful not to reduce it to something we do just to make us feel better. Thus, Philosophy as a Way of Life ought not to be conceived merely as a form of therapy. The same applies, if we avoid talk of happiness and instead focus on self-formation or self-cultivation as the goal of philosophy.

### 3.3 Philosophy as a Discipline

Conceived as a discipline, philosophy may be taken as a rational inquiry. In this sense, philosophy is an activity that consists in a systematic search for truth, knowledge or the principles of reality.[34] Such a search is actually described as rational when it is done following certain pattern of reasoning. What this means is that philosophy as a discipline is carried out according to certain procedures or method, principles and norms, canons and rules, which are taken to be universal and foundational to the discipline.

It is in this sense that philosophy is taken to be the pursuit of truth, a search for the knowledge of reality as well as an understanding of man's place in the universe. A further understanding to philosophy as a rational inquiry may be gained by stating that philosophy as a discipline is essentially an activity in search for knowledge that embodies the instrument of language. In other words, as an activity, philosophy adopts language in navigating the entirety of reality or aspects of it. Indeed, in the discipline of philosophy the instrument of language is employed in accessing and assessing the world or the human environment or nature, or reality as a whole. As it is understood, language is taken as the veritable instrument of thought and communication. It is to be noted that language as referred to here, does not only indicate verbal language; it also refers to other forms of expressive communication such as sign language.

In employing the instrument of language, philosophy consolidates on its being a rational and critical activity that employs the principles and methods of logical analysis to interrogate existing beliefs, claims, assumptions, ideas, positions and dispositions, resulting in a clearer and better understanding of reality, whether social, political,

[34] Isaac E. Ukpokolo, *Methodology of Research and Writing in Philosophy: A Guide* (Ibadan: Kairos Publishing, 2015), p. 8.

cultural, spiritual or moral. To this extent, philosophy raises questions that are directed at subjecting our beliefs and worldviews to critical interrogation and analysis, following the method of logic and coherence in thought.

And so, by deploying the tools of logic, conceptual analysis, criticalness, coherence and systematicity, the philosopher is able to navigate the human condition and come up with those fundamental, normative, transcendental and overarching general principles and methods that underlie human knowledge, reasoning, actions and the understanding of being. In this vein, the discipline of philosophy clarifies and sanitises human experiences and conditions, and ultimately reveals how things ought to be. It is to this extent that philosophy is not just primarily critical; it is generally analytical and ultimately constructive.[35]

**In the light of the foregoing, the philosopher attempts to remove all unclarities, ambiguities, vagueness, confusions or obscurities, so as to arrive at a better understanding of reality. This, it is believed, would enhance choices and actions. In the words of the French philosopher and scientist, Rene Descartes, the technique of investigation or procedure of reasoning which is able to yield reliable knowledge is that which follows the system of logic, starting from, as it is done in deductive system of logic, some intuitively axiomatic premises, and proceeding through necessary**

Another sense in which philosophy as a discipline may be understood is represented as philosophy being a "body of knowledge, a system of beliefs, theories, hypotheses and claims."[36] Here, we find claims represented in rather 'completed' bodies of knowledge, identifiable in branches of philosophy, such as epistemology, metaphysics, logic, ethics, and so on. Epistemology, for instance, is that branch of philosophy concerned with discovering the fundamental, or underlying, normative principles and methods concerning knowledge, and how this is distinguished from mere opinion. This is the point of epistemology as theory of knowledge.

As a discipline (a body of knowledge), philosophy also manifests in the area of metaphysics, which has to do with the theory of reality. Questions raised here include: "What is reality, and how is it different from mere appearance?" "What is the nature of the stuff of which reality is made – matter or form (spirit)?" Seen as such, the task of metaphysics is to establish that body of knowledge which consists in a framework of

[35] Isaac E. Ukpokolo, *Methodology of Research and Writing in Philosophy: A Guide*, p. 30.

[36] Ibid. p. 29.

criteria for what it is for a thing to be. This body of knowledge or system of discourse is sometimes referred to as ontology.[37]

Furthermore, there is ethics or moral philosophy which deals with the rightness or wrongness of human conduct, while logic attempts a discovery of the principles and methods of correct reasoning. By this, philosophy as a discipline, has to do with aspects of the world, reality, human conduct, the meaning, purpose and goal of life and existence, as well as order and coherence in human reasoning.

## 4.0 Conclusion

The student would have by now, seen the various ways philosophy may be conceived. It is however pertinent to note, as stated before, that the perspectives to conceiving philosophy mentioned here do not exhaust the ways in which philosophy may be conceived. That said, the discussion of some of the ways philosophy may be conceived, presented in this unit, with the definitions of philosophy offered in the first unit further expands the student's horizon for understanding philosophy. To be sure, the possibility of conceiving philosophy in the above examined ways reveal the far-reaching inclusiveness of philosophy.

## 5.0 Summary

This discussion on the conception of philosophy introduced the student to a number of basic perspectives regarding how philosophy may be conceived. Three conceptions of philosophy: philosophy as a worldview; philosophy as a way of life; and philosophy as a discipline were examined. Conceiving philosophy in these ways helps in providing a broad understanding of philosophy. As such, as worldview, philosophy is employed in relation to an individual's general attitude towards life and relationships – attitudes grounded on certain guiding principles; as a way of life, philosophy refers to a mode of existing-in-the-world, with the goal of transforming the whole of the individual's life; and as a discipline, philosophy describes the study of the subject-matter in a more technical context, much like other disciplines as political science, economics and history.

## 6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

i. Briefly explain the following conceptions of philosophy
   a. Philosophy as world view
   b. Philosophy as a way of life
   c. Philosophy as a discipline
ii. Highlight two essential features of each of these conceptions of philosophy

[37] Isaac E. Ukpokolo, *Methodology of Research and Writing in Philosophy: A Guide*, p. 29.

## 7.0 References/Further Reading


W. James, 1911. *Some Problems of Philosophy* (New York: Longman, Green, and Co.

Lucretius, 1951. *The Nature of the Universe* (Baltimore: Penguin Books.

Hegel, 1967. *The Phenomenology of Mind*, New York: Harper Torch book.

Samuel Alexander, 1966. *Space, Time, and Deity*, vol. 2 (New York: Dover Publications.

Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1003a 18-25.

Pierre Hadot, 1995. *Philosophy as a Way of Life*. Ed. Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Michael Chase. Oxford: Blackwell.

Olusegun Oladipo, 2008. *Thinking About Philosophy, A General Guide*. Ibadan: Hope Publications.

Isaiah Berlin, 1978. "The Purpose of Philosophy," in his *Concepts and Categories*. London: The Hogarth Press.

Richard T. Gray Trans. 1995. *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche 2: Unfashionable Observations*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Michel Foucault, 1991. "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," in *The Foucault Reader*. Ed. Paul Rabinow. London: Penguin, 340-72.

John Sellars, 2014. "Plato's *Apology of Socrates, A Metaphilosophical Text"*, *Philosophy and Literature* 38, 433-45.

Plato, *Apology* 28e.

Plato, *Gorgias* 500c

Isaac E. Ukpokolo, 2015. *Methodology of Research and Writing in Philosophy: A Guide,* Ibadan: Kairos Publishing.

## UNIT 3: FEATURES OF PHILOSOPHY

**Contents**



## 1.0 Introduction

In this lecture, we shall discuss some of the features that mark out philosophy as a discipline. The discussion shall be broken into what we have referred to as (i) basic features, (ii) logic and argument, and then (iii) language of philosophy. We have decided to discuss logic and argument, and language of philosophy separately because they represent key features that easily identify philosophy as a discipline. For one, the language of philosophy should be able to convey the philosopher's intended meaning in examining subject-matters; that is, the philosopher's mastery of language should be such as to reveal the philosophic disposition to addressing issues. This philosophic disposition, to be sure, is marked by a heuristic attitude whereby the philosopher does not assume a position to be the final statement about such issues. Rather, the philosopher presents claims with the understanding that the discovery of more details regarding a particular subject-matter may result in the revision of the claims of the philosopher. And so, the discussion in this unit is meant to introduce you to the features of philosophy by providing you with an understanding of important features of philosophy. Let me say, as stated in previous units, that this unit is meant to continue the introduction of the student to the discipline of philosophy.

## 2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

i. Identify a number of basic features of philosophy and
ii. Explain some of these key features of philosophy

## 3.0 Main Content

The content of this module will be examined in the following headings: (i) Some Basic Features; (ii) Logic and Argument; and (iii) Language of Philosophy.

### 3.1 Some Basic Features

The basic features to be examined include (i) Analysis; (ii) Clarity; (iii) Criticism; (iv) Coherence; and (v) Conciseness.

#### 3.1.1 Analysis

By analysis is implied the reduction of complex ideas or explication of human situations into understandable, relational concepts. Through analysis, essential concepts are extracted from experience so that they may be more easily understood and debated. According to A. P. Martinich,[38] analysis is analogous to definition. Definitions are explicitly about giving the meanings of words; analyses are explicitly about giving the necessary and sufficient conditions for concepts. Since words express concepts, definitions are the linguistic counterparts to analyses. Every analysis, like every definition, consists of two parts, an analysandum and an analysans.

The analysandum is the notion that needs to be explained and clarified, because there is something about it that is not understood. The analysans is the part of the analysis that explains and clarifies the analysandum, either by breaking it down into parts or by specifying its relations to other notions. An analysis tries to specify in its analysans *necessary and sufficient conditions* for the concept expressed in the analysandum. Necessary conditions are those that the analysans must contain in order to avoid being too weak, while sufficient conditions are those that are enough to guarantee that the concept in the analysans is satisfied.

Analysis can be defective for some reasons, three of which include: if it is circular, too broad, or too weak. An analysis is circular if the analysandum, or its key term occurs in the analysans. It is too broad just in case it is possible to give an example of the notion being analyzed that does not satisfy all the conditions specified in the analysans; conversely, an analysis is too weak just in case it is possible to describe something that

[38] See A. P. Martinich, *Philosophical Writing: An Introduction*, 3rd Edition (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), pp. 100-101.

satisfies all the conditions set down in the analysans, but is not an instance of the analysandum.

Generally, analysis must fulfil its primary goal of understanding. As such, the idea of analysis presupposes that the object of philosophical analysis is the attainment of the understanding through a simplification of the text in question. When analysis is done without understanding and simplicity, the goal has been defeated.

### 3.1.2 Clarity

All too often, we simply take for granted or assume that humans have common experiences that lead to commonly held understandings of what we communicate to each other. We are, after all, thrown into the same world with many already established, taken for granted ideas of what is entailed in human experience. One responsibility the philosopher has is to challenge and ultimately clarify those constructs we use to make sense of the world; constructs often taken for granted rather than clarified and truly understood.[39] But 'clarity' is itself a complex concept with many dimensions. However, in philosophy, the dimension that stands out most of all is precision, which involves avoiding ambiguity, vagueness and indeterminacy.[40]

A work in philosophy should not be ambiguous, vague or indeterminate if it must be clear. For a philosophical write-up not to be ambiguous, the specific or particular sense in which words and concepts are used must stand out. A writer should not assume that the audience already knows the meaning or the sense in which he or she uses a concept. Rather, it is his or her duty to make the sense of a word or concept stand out in the work. To avoid vagueness, an author must express his or her thought clearly and coherently.

A poorly expressed thought or one that is not coherent in meaning only blurs clarity. And so, concepts and ideas must be established very firmly to avoid indeterminateness. The ability to do these makes for clarity.

### 3.1.3 Criticism

Criticism means making judgments as to value. Philosophers judge the instrumental or practical value of ideas, concepts, theories, precepts and perspectives; and in this critical, interpretive mode, they build new and better conceptual understandings. They ask questions such as whether a particular proposal to deal with a situation works, and if not, how can such proposal be improved on?

---

[39] See Eric Sheffield, Beyond Abstraction: Philosophy as a Practical Qualitative Research Method. TH *Qualitative Report*, 9-4 (2004)

[40] A. P. Martinich, *Philosophical Writing*, p. 146.

Criticism allows a researcher or writer in philosophy to investigate and then mediate experience and thereby formulate solutions to problems; problems of a specific type. It is also clear that in extracting conceptual constructs that drive actual practice (rather than from some imagined practice), philosophy is a very qualitative, experiential method.[41]

Criticism can be destructive or constructive as evident in the history of philosophy. Destructive criticisms are primarily aimed at rubbishing or rendering irrational and untenable a particular theory, idea, belief, thought or knowledge claim. For instance, the positivists' attack on metaphysics is more often than not, destructive.

Constructive criticism on the other hand seeks to identify problems in a particular theory, idea, belief, thought or knowledge claim, with the primary goal of reconstructing it or making it better. Constructive criticism is encouraged for better scholarly sportsmanship, as no idea is full proof or without the need for some revision, improvement or correction.

### 3.1.4 Coherence

A philosophical assertion or claim or position is coherent if its parts are logically and orderly consistent and related. An integral part of coherence is continuity, that is, the way such philosophical claim or assertion moves from one part to another toward its goal.

A claim that twists and wanders, seemingly not directed to any particular goal, is defective even if each part of such assertion is charged with great rhetorical energy. There are many ways in which coherence is achieved in essays. Sometimes, one part of an essay coheres with another because they share a subject matter. In addition to sharing a specific subject matter, sentences hang together in other ways. One of these ways is through stock phrases that mark the boundaries of large parts of an assertion.

### 3.1.5 Conciseness

Conciseness, as a feature of philosophy, combines brevity and content. Being concise means conveying a lot of information in a brief space. Brevity, perhaps, does not call for much comment. It is desirable because it typically makes fewer demands on the reader's attention and understanding.

Although brevity is a good policy, it admits of exceptions. Sometimes the rhythm of language recommends a wordier sentence. It is sometimes necessary to use more, rather than fewer, words in order to stretch out the content of a sentence and thereby make it more intelligible to your reader.

[41] Eric Sheffield, "Beyond Abstraction: Philosophy as a Practical Qualitative Research Method," TH *Qualitative Report*, 9-4, p. 763.

Further, brevity does not guarantee efficiency; it concerns only *how* something is said and not at all what is said. In determining the efficiency or economy of a sentence or essay, one must consider content in addition to brevity.

A brief but vacuous sentence does not communicate more efficiently than a prolix but informative one. Thus, it is not in itself desirable to sacrifice content for the sake of brevity, although this might be desirable for some other reason: to vary sentence length or to prepare the reader for some complicated explanation. Thus, brevity and content must be balanced. That is the force of the admonition to be concise.[42]

## 3.2 Logic and Argument

Logic, in its traditional sense, is the study of correct inference. It studies formal structures and non-formal relations which hold between evidence and hypothesis, reasons and belief, or premises and conclusion. It is the study of both conclusive and inconclusive inferences or, as it is also commonly described, the study of both entailments and inductions.

**Specifically, logic involves the detailed study of formal systems designed to exhibit such entailments and inductions. More generally, though, it is the study of those conditions under which evidence rightly can be said to justify, entail, imply, support, corroborate, confirm or falsify a conclusion.[43]**

Logic is thus the science of reason involved in the business of evaluating arguments by sorting out good ones from bad ones, using sound principles or techniques of good reasoning.[44] Arguments, as understood in logic, consist of arguing for a position by means of conclusive or highly probable evidence. Hence, in an argument, there is a conclusion (the position being held or argued for) and premise(s) (the evidence(s) or reason(s) for holding the position).

In some arguments, premises provide conclusive or undeniable grounds for accepting the conclusion; these arguments are referred to as deductive arguments. In such arguments, it will be a contradiction to accept the premises and deny the conclusion. In some other arguments, the premises provide only sufficient but not conclusive or necessary basis for accepting the conclusion; thus, making the conclusion only highly probable. In this case, the argument is an inductive one where one does not fall into a contradiction by accepting the premise and denying the conclusion.

---

[42] See A. P. Martinich, *Philosophical Writing*, pp. 151-154.

[43] A. D. Irvine, "Philosophy of Logic," In Stuart G. Shanker (Ed.), *Routledge History of Philosophy Volume IX: Philosophy of Science, Logic and Mathematics in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 9.

[44] Cf. P. D. Magnus, *An Introduction to Formal Logic* (Forallx: http://www.fecundity.com/logic, 2006), p. 5.

The importance of logic as the principles and techniques for good reasoning and well-constructed arguments becomes obvious as a feature of philosophy. This indicates that integral as a feature of philosophy is making sound arguments and analyses, providing good reasons for holding a position or supporting one, and engaging in a logical and coherent assessment of arguments.

Logic, as the science of reasoning, provides the needed training for the philosopher. This is why Logic is a core discipline in any philosophy curriculum. That logic is very essential for good reasoning in general, accounts for the reason why every student in a tertiary institution in Nigeria is made to be trained, at least, in the elementary aspects of logical tools and techniques, particularly at the first year of study. This is because the formators of the country's education curriculum are well aware that every student needs logic for good reasoning and assessment of arguments in any field of study.

Philosophy's case is not exceptional. In fact, philosophy students are privileged to excavate deeper into the rich soil of logic over and over again before graduation. The obvious preferential treatment accorded philosophy students in the study of logic stems from the fact that logic is the philosophy student's most effective tool in carrying out his or her assignment. In fact, logic is ingrained in the study of philosophy and can never be left out of it at any point in time.

For example, the student is trained on the laws of thought, namely the law of identity, the law of non-contradiction, and the law of excluded middle, and how or where they can be applied. The student is also taught the fallacies that should be avoided when arguing for a position, such as the fallacies of relevance and fallacies of ambiguity. The student is also trained in the techniques and rules of formal logic and how breaking such principles can weaken an argument. For instance, in a syllogistic argument, one does not use a particular term in two sense. The term 'ruler' could mean a measuring tool or a leader of a people. When the term is used in a syllogistic argument, it must be used in just one of the senses to avoid ambiguity or vagueness. If this rule is broken, the writer commits the Fallacy of Equivocation. Also, the fact that a term is used in more than one sense in the same argument suggests implicitly that the argument contain more than the required number of three terms that a good syllogism should have. The argument also therefore commits the Fallacy of Four Terms. Consider the following example:

A ruler straightens things
David is a Ruler
Therefore, David should straighten things

In the argument, the term 'ruler' is used in different senses and can be misleading. This makes the argument fallacious. The philosopher is also trained by the use of brain tasking calculations and exercises in formal logic, involving the application of valid rules to arguments such as the rules of inference, the rule of replacement, the rule of conditional

**proof and the rule of indirect proof. The application of these rules exercises the brain and makes the student to think faster and sharply about issues. Therefore, the importance of logic and argument as a feature of philosophy cannot be overlooked.**

**Related to the deployment of arguments in philosophy to make a claim, is the question of who bears the burden of proof in an argument. Roughly, the person who asserts or otherwise relies upon the truth of a proposition for the cogency of his position bears what is usually referred to as the burden of proof. It should however be stated here that it is impossible to prove every proposition. In every science, some propositions are considered as basic or taken-for-granted assumptions. They are simply assumed without proof. In geometry, these principles are axioms, which traditionally were considered self-**evident.

In this vein, there are many propositions, which, although are not self-evident, need not be proven every time they are used, since the evidence for them is very familiar. For example, it need not be proven that the world is round and very old; that humans use languages to communicate, and so on. On the other hand, in most contexts, you should not simply assume that only one object exists or that non-human animals use languages to communicate. These are controversial views and need support.

## 3.3 Language of Philosophy

In a rather general sense, we communicate through language. In fact, communication is not possible if the speaker and the hearer or the writer and his or her audience do not understand each other's language of communication. All we have to say, the points we are making, the analyses we do, or the arguments we put forward are only possible through the tool of language. Hence, a strong mastery of the language by which we communicate and which our audience understand, is very essential as a feature of philosophy.

Olusegun Oladipo identifies two major reasons why language is an essential tool of philosophy.[45] First is the obvious reason that philosophical ideas and theories are expressed in language, which is why a philosopher ought to have a good mastery of the language he or she communicates in. When the philosopher has such mastery, he or she is able to express himself or herself with clarity and precision of thought and without vagueness and ambiguity of speech: a much-desired objective in philosophy. This also accounts for the pursuit of meaning in philosophy which involves the clarification of concepts and terms employed in a philosophical essay to express our ideas and viewpoints.

[45] See Olusegun Oladipo, *Thinking about Philosophy*, pp. 22-23.

Second, mastery of language places the philosopher in an advantageous position over professionals in other disciplines. The philosopher uses language to sort out human experiences, reveal the connection that exist between things and events, create and construct concepts to represent multiplicity of events and experiences and generally become more enlightened about the nature of the world and the place of humankind in it.

John Stuart Mill is thus compelled to compare the role of language in philosophical inquiry to the role of telescopes in astronomical inquiry. He says therefore that:

> Language is evidently and by the admission of all philosophers, one of the principal instruments or helps of thought and any imperfection in the instrument, or in the mode of employing it, is confessedly liable... For a mind not previously versed in the meaning and right use of the various kinds of words to attempt the study of methods of philosophizing would be as if someone should attempt to become an astronomical observer having never learnt to adjust the focal distance of his optical instrument, so as to see distinctly.[46]

From the foregoing, it is evident that language – in the context of philosophy, the right of words to convey the intended meaning – is indispensable to philosophy and the philosopher. As stated earlier, the philosopher's mastery and use of language should be such as to aid him or her in addressing issues in the philosophic way. The philosophic way or disposition, to be sure, is defined by a heuristic attitude whereby the philosopher does not assume a position to be the final statement about such issues. Let me state here that the heuristic attitude is an experiential one wherein the philosopher relies on available data to arrive at conclusions. Such conclusion, however, are tentative, given that the availability of further experiential details that where not earlier known may cause a revision of conclusions that were made before. With this understanding, the philosopher's language is usually put in ways that presents claims with the understanding that the discovery of more details regarding a particular subject-matter may result in the modification of the claims of the philosopher.

## 4.0 Conclusion

Let us conclude here by stating that the features of philosophy described above are integral to any understanding of philosophy. It is therefore important that the student is conversant with these features as they mark out a work in philosophy, whether a piece of writing or a more extensive work such as a long essay which the student would write at the end of the undergraduate degree programme or other such writing in the course of studying for a degree in philosophy. With this in view, it is pertinent that the student

[46] J. S. Mill, *System of Logic: Ratiocinative and Inductive*, 8th Edition (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1882), p. 24.

develops these as he or she goes through the training in philosophy. To be sure, these are not just features; they are also skills to be imbibed or cultivated in the course of a philosophical training, with the intent of distinguishing the individual as a philosopher.

## 5.0 Summary

In this unit, we examined a number of features of philosophy. Summarily, these features are key to understanding the basics of philosophy, particularly as they are integral to what makes an inquiry philosophical. As such, philosophical inquiry into questions and issues involves, among other things, applying the method of philosophical criticism and analysis that include coherency, clarity and conciseness.

## 6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

i. Briefly explain the following features of philosophy:
   a. Analysis
   b. Clarity
   c. Criticism
   d. Coherence
   e. Conciseness

ii. How is logic and language important to the discipline of philosophy?

## 7.0 References/Further Reading


Koetting, R. and Mallisa, M. 2004 Philosophy Research and Education. In D. Jonassen (Ed.), *Handbook of Research in Educational Communications and Technology,* Mahwah, New Jersey: Laurence Erlbaum Associates.

Martinich, A. P. 2005, *Philosophical Writing: An Introduction*, 3rd Edition, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Rippon, S. 2008. *A Brief Guide to Writing the Philosophy Paper,* Harvard: Harvard College Writing Centre Brief Guide Series.

Sheffield, E. 2004. "Beyond Abstraction: Philosophy as a Practical Qualitative Research Method." TH *Qualitative Report*, 9-4.

Irvine, A. D. 1996. Philosophy of Logic. In Stuart G. Shanker (Ed.), *Routledge History of Philosophy Volume IX: Philosophy of Science, Logic and Mathematics in the Twentieth Century*, London: Routledge.

Magnus, P. D. 2006. *An Introduction to Formal Logic*, Forallx: http://www.fecundity.com/logic.

Mill, J. S. 1882. *System of Logic: Ratiocinative and Inductive,* 8th Edition, New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers.

Oladipo, O. 2008. *Thinking about Philosophy, A General Guide*, Ibadan: Hope Publication,

## UNIT 4: METHOD IN PHILOSOPHY

**Contents**



### 1.0 Introduction

In this lecture, we will examine the nature of the method of philosophy, which is distinct from that of science. An attempt will be made to elaborate on a number of methods employed in philosophy, with a view to getting the beginner in philosophy to become conversant with the various methods of philosophising. This is because if he or she is familiar with the different methods that are usually employed in philosophy, such beginner will be able to grasp faster the nature of arguments in philosophy. He or she can also choose a suitable method when carrying out a particular research. There are a number of methods that have been used by philosophers down the history of philosophy in engaging in philosophical inquiry. They include but are surely not limited to the

Socratic Method, the Speculative Method or the Method of Abstraction, the Cartesian Method or Method of Doubt, the Dialectical Method, and the Phenomenological Method.

## 2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

iii. Describe the nature of philosophical method
iv. Identify particular methods in philosophy
v. Explain some methods used in philosophy

## 3.0 Main Content

The content of this unit will be examined under two headings: (i) method in philosophy contra method in science and (ii) methods of philosophising. In examining the method of philosophy, we shall contrast it with the method employed in science. The method of philosophy admits of a number of other methods which includes, but not limited to the Socratic Method, the Dialectical Method, the Cartesian Method, the Phenomenological Method and the Speculative Method. Our discussion of these methods in the second sub-section of this unit will familiarise the beginner with the various methods employed in philosophy.

### 3.1 Method in Philosophy contra Method in Science

Science as an academic discipline studies natural objects and events in the universe in order to discover regularities and laws governing them. Scientific research or writing does not create the natural world. Rather, it proceeds by experimentation and records what has been observed by description. Science is thus primarily a descriptive discipline, although every now and then, theoretical constructs in science bears elements of normativity that quickly turns them to philosophical issues, particularly in epistemology and the philosophy of science.

To say that science is descriptive is to say that science describes the natural objects and events in the universe as they are. It does not focus on painting a normative picture of the world or providing a normative understanding of the universe. Its approach to the universe is ideally experimental and descriptive.

Philosophical inquiry, on the other hand, is primarily normative or prescriptive; it is concerned with how things ought to be viewed rather than how they are viewed or understood. Its inquiry into the nature of reality, knowledge and values does not require the observation of particular things or events or the gathering of particular data but a

prescriptive interpretation and analysis of already available data, generalisations and information about the universe.

Put differently, questions such as: what is real? Is there an ultimate reality? How do we know what we claim to know? What makes an action moral? What is the best form of human society and the state? cannot be resolved by merely describing things and events in the universe. Rather they are best resolved through a rational prescriptive inquiry into the nature of things.

This does not in any way imply that philosophical inquiry does not need the services of science or vice versa. While philosophers may, from time to time, make use of scientific generalisations or results, they generally avoid the scientist's specialised business of collecting and arguing about empirical data. Sometimes, empirical evidence from psychology, physics or other fields of inquiry can be put to good use in philosophical arguments. But a research in philosophy must be ready to explain exactly why such empirical evidence is relevant and exactly what normative principles one can draw from it.

Apart from this, philosophers still find a lot to argue about even when they put empirical questions aside. For one thing, the question of: What sort of empirical evidence would be needed to decide the answer to a question? might itself be a non-empirical question that philosophers discuss. For another, philosophers spend a lot of time discussing how different claims (which may be empirical) relate logically to each other. For example, a common philosophical project is to show how two or more views cannot be held consistently with each other, or to show that although two views are consistent with one another, they together entail an implausible third claim.[47]

Therefore, an important distinction between inquiry in science and in philosophy is the famous is/ought distinction or the descriptive/prescriptive distinction. While science provides us with a description of the world, philosophy offers a normative analysis of the world and of human existence. Flowing from the descriptive/prescriptive distinction, the object of study in scientific and philosophical researches varies.

In general, when we research or write, it is always about something or someone. Research always has an object in focus. But the kind of object varies based on the nature of the discipline. Science as basically a descriptive discipline, describes objects and events in the physical universe. Its sub-disciplines in the natural, social and applied sciences are specialised in the study of a particular object or sphere of the material universe. Biology studies and describes the nature and contents of biological components and organisms of the universe. Chemistry has the chemical constituents of the material

[47] Simon Rippon, *A Brief Guide to Writing the Philosophy Paper*, p. 5.

universe as its object of study. Psychology is the scientific study of human brain processes and mental states. Hence, every specialised scientific discipline has a specialised and identifiable object of study.

But it is difficult to identify or specify the subject-matter or object of study of philosophy the way we can specify the concerns of scientific disciplines such as economics, biology, chemistry, physics, and psychology.[48] It is thus not surprising for new students in philosophy to ask their tutor after some lectures, what exactly they are studying. The difficulty of identifying the object of study of philosophy does not imply that philosophical inquiry, research or writing is not intended toward something. It is however the case that unlike scientific disciplines which studies specific objects in the universe, reveal specific information about them by gathering particular individuated facts or data about their objects of study, the subject-matter of philosophy is general in nature.

Philosophical questions are not intended toward a specific object in the universe nor are they meant to reveal specific information about their nature through the individual data collected. Rather, philosophical questions are general in nature. This is because dealing with such research questions in philosophy does not require the gathering of specific data or the accumulation of particular facts. It rather involves how best to explain and analyse the already available facts to make sense of them in the search for answers for the ultimate questions of reality, knowledge and value.[49]

Philosophical research and writing are identified not only by the general nature of the subject-matter they address but also by their fundamental nature. Not every scientific research interests each one of us in our everyday lives. The study of planetary bodies and how life can survive there, or the accumulation of information of the psychology of a lion may not immediately interest us even if there are reasons to believe that in the long run, such information may be useful for mankind.

However, every philosophical question that drives research in philosophy should interest any rational human being because the questions are essentially concerned with human existence and survival and the answers given them, and the answers we accept about them directly affect how we behave. Thus, questions about reality, knowledge, morality, or the ideal state are not trivial but fundamental.

Thus, while scientific research has specific subject-matter, philosophical inquiry deals with general and fundamental questions about reality, knowledge and value. To engage in scientific inquiry is to describe, to experiment and to draw conclusions. To engage in philosophical inquiry is to theorise, to analyse, to critique, to raise questions, and to pose as problematic, that which we investigate.

[48] See Olusegun Oladipo, *Thinking about Philosophy: A General Guide* (Ibadan: Hope Publication, 2008), p. 11.
[49] Cf. Olusegun Oladipo, Thinking about philosophy, pp. 32-33.

From the foregoing, science has a popular method of studying the natural universe, which has become so popular and infamous it is being imposed on other disciplines or forms of life as 'the' model rather than 'a' model of research. This method is referred to as the scientific method. The scientific method is generally regarded as the procedure employed in carrying out research in the sciences or, put differently, it is concerned with principles of evaluation of statements in the empirical sciences. As R. S. Rudner explains, "…the methodology of a scientific discipline is not a matter of its transient techniques but of its logic of justification. The method of science is, indeed, the rationale on which it bases its acceptance or rejection of hypothesis or theories."[50]

Thus, when people talk of the scientific method, they are simply referring to the general properties and consideration that are used in the confirmation or refutation of a hypothesis in the various sciences; that is, the common way in which hypotheses are assessed or researches are carried out in the sciences. As a method of research, the scientific method is said to be identified with a number of procedural stages, phases or steps.

Scholars are generally not unanimous about the exact number of the research stages in the scientific method. According to H. Siegel, that there is no consensus on the exact number of stages in the method does not imply that the scientific method cannot be characterized generally as consisting in, for example, a concern for explanatory adequacy, however that adequacy is conceived, an insistence on testing, however testing is thought to be best done, and a commitment to inductive support.[51]

Kwasi Wiredu provides a characterisation of the scientific method. According to him, the method of science involves hypothesis, experiment and observation. Scientific method has in practice attained a high degree of complexity, but, in bare essentials, it is characterised as follows: The mind is challenged by a problem for a solution; such that, however plausible the solution may be, it is not immediately asserted as true. It is merely entertained as a hypothesis, a tentative proposal, to be put to the test.

But before that, its significance has to be explored; that is, its logical implications have to be unravelled in conjunction with other known facts. This is the stage of the elaboration of the hypothesis, which often requires techniques of deduction. The result, however, is always of the logical form of an implication: "if the hypothesis is true, then, such and such other things should be the case. The stage is then set for empirical confirmation and disconfirmation."[52]

---

[50] R. S. Rudner, *Philosophy of Social Science* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1966), p. 5.

[51] H. Siegel, What is the Question concerning the Rationality of Science? *Philosophy of Science*, 52-54 (1985), p. 528.

[52] K. Wiredu, *Philosophy and an African Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 144.

Straightforward observation or very technical experimentation may be called for in this stage of confirmation or disconfirmation. If results turn out not to be in agreement with the implications of the hypothesis, it is said to be falsified. It is, accordingly, either abandoned or modified. On the other hand, if results prove to conform to the elaborated hypothesis, it is said to be confirmed. It is the confirmed hypotheses that are regarded as laws and constitute the main corpus of scientific knowledge.[53]

According to Siegel, what is striking about the method of science is its commitment to evidence and to the form of reasoning as described above, which is what ensures the objectivity and rationality of science. In other words, science is rational to the extent that it proceeds in accordance with such a commitment to evidence or form of reasoning.[54] This is what gives the scientific method its popularity.

But philosophical inquiry cannot be associated with any such particular method of study due to the general nature of its inquiry. Thus, although philosophy is a rational inquiry, there is no one single method of carrying out its inquiry, as is the scientific method. Rather, there are varieties of methods based on the philosophical school of thought. To be sure, every rational inquiry, such as philosophy, begins with doubt and ends with the establishment of belief which also becomes a source of further inquiries. However, in philosophy, there is no singular and generally accepted process of arriving at established beliefs or theories as we may find in science. There are varying methods.

## 3.2 Methods of Philosophising

The history of philosophical inquiry brings to our attention such philosophical methods as the Socratic method, the Dialectical method, the Cartesian method, the Phenomenological method, the Speculative method, or the method of abstraction. It would be stated here that it is essential that students and researchers are familiar with the multiple methods of philosophy and apply them in the best suited research cases since the particular issue being researched or written on may determine the method adopted. We would therefore examine these methods, while mentioning that these do not exhausts the methods used in philosophising.

### 3.2.1 Socratic Method

The Socratic method, which draws from Socrates' method of philosophising, consists of a number of stages. Following Socrates, as such, he first presents his philosophical views in an everyday conversation-like situation, casually mentioning them to his companion and

[53] K. Wiredu, *Philosophy and an African Culture*, p. 145.

[54] See B. R. Baigrie, "Siegel on the Rationality of Science," *Philosophy of Science*, 55-53 (1988), p. 436.

engaging their interest. Second, he would point out a certain philosophical concept that needs to be analysed. Third, he would profess ignorance and ask his companion his opinion on the matter. When given the other person's answer, Socrates would analyse their definition by asking questions that expose its weakness or wrongness.

Once again, the person would provide another definition, revised more clearly this time, and again Socrates would repeat the process of questioning, exposing the weakness of the revised definition. They continue in this way until the clearest definition of the question is reached. In this manner, Socrates would also cause the other person to realize his own ignorance, which is the first step, according to Socrates, to wisdom. Socrates also employed in his method, the use of the *reductio ad absurdum* form of argument, which means "reducing to an absurdity."

He would begin by assuming that his companion's offered definition is true but then show that it logically implied either an absurdity or a conclusion that contradicted other conclusions previously drawn by his companion. By exposing a false statement from the proposition, he skilfully proved that the assumption, rationally, must be false. Although sometimes quite frustrating to one, Socrates' use of the method, combined with the *reduction ad absurdum* argument, proved effective and eye-opening.

### 3.2.2 Dialectical Method

The Dialectical method is a method of argument or exposition that systematically weighs contradictory facts or ideas, with a view to the resolution of their real or apparent contradictions. In other words, it involves disputation or debate particularly intended to resolve differences between two views, rather than to establish one of them as true. It is thus the process of reconciliation of contradiction either of beliefs or in historical processes. This method, as such, reconciles the seeming differences between what is usually referred to as a thesis with its antithesis, in a synthesis. This synthesis, which is the reconciliation between the thesis and the antithesis, becomes a new thesis, which will later on be reconciled with its antithesis in a new synthesis. In this way, knowledge progresses.

This method is more pronounced in the works of G.W.F. Hegel and Karl Marx. Hegel applied the method in arriving at truth by stating a thesis, developing a contradictory antithesis, and combining and resolving them into a coherent synthesis. It is also seen in the Marxian process of change through the conflict of opposing forces, whereby a given contradiction is characterized by a primary and a secondary aspect, the secondary succumbing to the primary, which is then transformed into an aspect of a new contradiction.

### 3.2.3 Cartesian Method

The Cartesian method of philosophy is associated with the philosopher Rene Descartes, in whose thought the method is pronouncedly used. It is a process of finding solutions to philosophical problems on a presuppositionless basis. It involves rejecting anything one may have known about an issue at hand and approaching the issue on a "clean slate".

Descartes' philosophy was deeply rooted in his desire to ascertain pure and certain foundations for knowledge. In order to accomplish this, he felt that he could not rely on what he had been taught, or what he thought he knew, as he could not be absolutely assured that this was pure and uncorrupted information. Thus, he set out to formulate clear and rational principles that could be organized into a system of truths from which accurate information could be deduced. The principle that he came up with as a starting point for his philosophy was that of methodic doubt, that is, to doubt everything.

Descartes believed that we should not rely on our observations of the world around us, as these perceptions could be deceiving. Consequently, Descartes believed that only those truths which he derived using reasoning, that is, reason and intuition alone, were reliable. This method is also referred to as Descartes' methodic doubt

### 3.2.4 Phenomenological Method

The phenomenological method is one of the most prominent philosophical method of the twentieth century popularised by Edmund Husserl. It aims to describe, understand and interpret the meanings of experiences of human life. It focuses on research questions such as what it is like to experience a particular situation. Husserl emphasised the centrality of the human context in understanding life; that is, researchers and readers of research can understand human experience because they are participants in the human condition. Thus, the task of understanding is to retain continuity with what is already experientially evident and familiar to us as humans.

As a method of inquiry, it is based on the premise that reality consists of objects and events as they are perceived or understood in human consciousness and not of anything independent of human consciousness. **The method is not intended to be a collection of particular facts about consciousness but is rather supposed to furnish us with facts about the essential natures of phenomena and their modes of givenness.** Borrowing from Descartes methodic doubt, the method employs phenomenological reduction in carrying out its research; that is, the bracketing of all we know about a phenomenon and approaching it presuppositionlessly in order for the thing to open itself to our consciousness just as it is.

### 3.2.5 Speculative Method

The speculative method or the method of abstraction involves the researcher's ability to explore imagination as a vast territory of enchanted possibilities. When philosophers are

faced with questions that transcends what sense experience can answer, they tend to speculate within the ambit of reason. To be sure, what may give rise to such questions are always within the realm of experience but in trying to answer them, philosophers usually apply the method of speculation and abstraction in a logical and rational manner. Plato's speculation about the world of forms and the robust description of such a world as if it were real and tangible is a clear case of abstraction resulting from a philosopher's dilemma on why certain things change and others do not, on what could be real as different from what appears to be real.

## 4.0 Conclusion

To effectively research in philosophy, it is clear from the above that we must not only be aware of the features of philosophical inquiry but master the methods that have characterised philosophical research. We are also to master the principles and techniques of good reasoning so as to be able to detect fallacious arguments in what we read, as well as when we write for others to read. We necessarily should be in full control of our language of communication and be willing to clarify the concepts we use in our discourse. It is also essential that we are familiar with the methods of research in philosophy and apply the appropriate method in particular research cases.

## 5.0 Summary

In the course of the unit, we learnt that philosophical inquiry is different from scientific inquiry mainly due to philosophy's normative character, and the general character of its subject-matter and variety of methods. In this vein, we learnt that philosophy does not have an identifiable, partial domain as its subject matter. It attempts to think about issues in the widest context. If it were a discipline focused only with an aspect of reality, it could at least be vaguely comprehended as being something other than, say, mathematics or sociology; that is, something that studies this domain as opposed to that. Philosophy leaves nothing out, and hence leaves us without the contrasting foil that would allow us to say what it is.

## 6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

i. How is the philosophical method different from the method of science?
ii. What do we mean when we say that philosophy is primarily normative or prescriptive
iii. Briefly explain the following methods employed in philosophy:
    a. the Socratic method
    b. the Dialectical method

c. the Cartesian method
d. the Phenomenological method and
e. the Speculative method

## 7.0 References/Further Reading


Baigrie, B. R. 1988. "Siegel on the Rationality of Science." *Philosophy of Science*, 55-53.

Oladipo, O. 2008. *Thinking about Philosophy: A General Guide* Ibadan: Hope Publication.

Rippon, S. 2008. *A Brief Guide to Writing the Philosophy Paper,* Harvard: Harvard College Writing Centre Brief Guide Series.

Rudner, R. S. 1966. *Philosophy of Social Science,* New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Siegel, H. 1985. What is the Question Concerning the Rationality of Science? *Philosophy of Science*, 52-4.

Sokolowski, R. 1998. The Method of Philosophy: Making Distinction. *The Review of Metaphysics*, 51-3.

Wiredu, K. 1980. *Philosophy and an African Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

# Module 2: The Value of Philosophy

Unit 1: The value of philosophy to the individual who studies it
Unit 2: The value of philosophy to other disciplines
Unit 3: The value of philosophy to the society
Unit 4: Political philosophy and social engineering

## UNIT 1: THE VALUE OF PHILOSOPHY TO THE INDIVIDUAL

**Contents**



### 1.0 Introduction

Welcome to this discussion on the value of philosophy to the individual who studies it. We shall be discussing the value of philosophy to the individual by examining the importance of the four cardinal branches of philosophy to the individual who studies them. Philosophy amongst other descriptions is the criticisms of the various ideas that inform our knowledge, mode of reasoning, values and beliefs. Its value or importance to the individual person cannot be overstated. As individuals, we need knowledge to be able

to understand and deal with the world - epistemology equips us for that. We need to have the ability to think properly and respond to our existential issues from a standpoint that is devoid of errors - logic furnishes us with that. We need also to come to terms with the fact that we do not live in isolation and for this reason, the way we live our lives as individuals has ripple effects on others, therefore, we ought to imbibe the acceptable ways of conduct - ethics brings us to this understanding. Finally, we need to appreciate the fact that as individuals, we are ambassadors of different realities, such as the mental and the physical even though we may differ on which is prior - metaphysics aids our awareness of this fact. In this unit, we shall examine the relevance of these various sub-branches of philosophy to the individual who studies them.

## 2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

By the end of this unit, you would be able to;

- State the value of epistemology to the individual
- Explain the relevance of logic to the individual
- Identify the value of ethics to the individual
- Explicate the value of metaphysics to the individual

## 3.0 Main Content

### 3.1 Value of Epistemology to the Individual

Epistemology is the branch of philosophy that seeks to answer questions concerning the possibility of knowledge and how knowledge claims can be justified. One of the basic tasks of epistemology is to proffer justifications for knowledge claims such that when a person says he knows something, he or she can be certain about knowing it and would not be guessing or trapped in the natural attitude of equating belief with knowledge or opinion with truth. Traditionally, knowledge has been defined as 'Justified True Belief' in which case, when a person claims to know something, he or she must be justified in knowing it, **the claim must be true and that person must believe the claim. We can say categorically then that the basic task of epistemology is the quest for certainty of knowledge. Without certainty of knowledge, it becomes difficult to make a distinction between a t**rue state of affairs and one that is misconceived. On many occasions, we would have found ourselves strongly affirming and holding on to positions which eventually turn out not to be the case i.e. holding onto appearances as though they were realities. Let us assume that you were to take part in an examination by 8am of the following day. You went to bed, woke up at an unknown time, looked through the window and the weather was totally dark. So, you assumed it was not dawn yet and went back to bed only to wake up few moments later with the weather so clear and the clock reads 9am. You wondered what could have gone wrong, not knowing that a brief moment of eclipse of the sun had occurred at the time you first woke up. This is an example of what we call the Gettier problem. You had a justified time belief which turned out to be

untrue. Epistemology has taught us to move beyond this level of Justified True Belief in search for a fourth condition that would lead to certainty. Epistemology equips the individual with a more critical spirit in dealing with a situation like the one mentioned above. We shall now itemise and discourse a few of the values of epistemology to the individual.

1. **It Takes Away Fear and Gives Us Better Understanding of Our World** Epistemology helps us to better understand our world by clarifying our thoughts and shining the light of knowledge on our uncertainties. We can imagine a world where a person is not certain about anything. Every moment of the life of such a person will be marked with fear, wonder and shock. Such a life will not be worth living. There were periods in history when life was replete with speculations and doubts. During these periods, people did not have as much knowledge and information that is available to us in our world today. A simple thunder from the sky was said to mean that the gods were having a fight, but we now know that thunder is caused by the rapid expansion of the air surrounding the path of a lightning bolt.[55] An eclipse of the sun was interpreted as a sign that the gods were angry at the evils of humankind but we now know that when the moon orbits or moves around earth, it sometimes appears between the sun and the earth. When this happens, the moon blocks the light of the sun from reaching the earth, thereby casting its own shadow on the earth and causing partial and sometimes total darkness to fall upon the earth. The appearance of rainbow in the sky after a rainfall was said to mean that God would have destroyed the world with water but on a second thought, He did not. But we now know that when light (i.e. from the sun) enters a water droplet, slowing down and bending as it goes from air to denser water, the light reflects off the inside of the droplet, separating into its component colours. When light exits the droplet, it makes a rainbow.[56] After arriving at new and informed information through a number of regular and scientifically calculated occurrences of the above events, people no longer have fear because they have knowledge. They could tell why and when to expect a thunder, they could predict the coming of the next eclipse and even make plans to watch it, they could tell why there is a rainbow in the sky and stand to appreciate its beauty. This is why it can be said that the extent to which our epistemology is right, is the extent to which we could have proper understanding of the world around us. For this reason, errors in epistemology will give us a poor and distorted picture of reality.

2. **Epistemology Inspires the Individual to Self-Examination** Self-examination is the quest for the knowledge of the self. History of philosophy has shown that there is the need for the knowledge of the self before the pursuit of the knowledge of the world. It is more like saying that there is the need to learn how

[55] Retrieved from https://www.loc.gov/rr/scitech/mysteries/thunder.html Accessed: 22/09/2019.
[56] Retrieved from https://scijinks.gov/rainbow/ Accessed: 22/09/2019.

to rule or control ourselves before seeking to control the world or further still, being able to govern one's family before seeking to govern the state. Hence, knowledge of the microcosm precedes knowledge of the macrocosm. Without the examination of one's life, life would have no worth or value. Worth is the quality that renders something desirable, useful or valuable. A person cannot decide whether something has worth without examining it and making that decision. Worth is not something that is necessarily good or bad, although society would generally hold on to worth as being something good. Worth is what people use to define why they still live. If their life has worth, they will continue to live and enjoy life. In this way, the Socratic dictum 'an unexamined life is not worth living' is important because without examining one's life, a person cannot determine its worth, and therefore has no reason to want to live.[57] Epistemology in this regard makes us cautious and less likely to embrace ideas and beliefs uncritically. This is why Socrates' claim as stated above that 'the unexamined life is not worth living' inspires in a person a deep and critical thought about life and shows that only in striving to come to know ourselves and to understand ourselves do our lives have any meaning or value.

3. **Epistemology Helps Us to Form the Right Questions and Opinions about the World** What you already know serves as foundation for your predictions and expectations of things to come. We rely on our experiences in making judgments about the world. Experiences help us to formulate the right questions and inform our opinions about the how and the why of events taking place around us. When our questions are not clear, our thinking will lack clarity and distinctness and it shows that, our belief is beclouded with unsubstantiated assumptions. Any belief formed on the basis of unjustified opinions lacks clarity, distinctness and, ultimately, usefulness. Such an opinion will not contribute to our knowledge and will likely be ineffective and incapable of being justified by us. Epistemology which raises questions about how we come to know the things we claim to know and the justifications for such claims is at the forefront of ensuring that our knowledge claims are able to withstand the criticisms of the skeptics.

## 3.2 Value of Logic to the Individual

In module 4, unit 2, the term logic is described in at least three different and correct senses which are as follows;

i. Logic is the totality of all the laws guiding human thoughts which is predicated on the fact that the ability to think or reason forms a basic and fundamental part of the nature of human beings. We were told that the laws guiding human thoughts are mostly self-evident in such a way that for human reasoning to make sense it must conform to some basic laws and when any part of the laws is violated in the course

[57] Retrieved from https://www.phrases.org.uk/bulletin_board/17/messages/171.html Accessed: 22/09/2019.

of an argument or reasoning, a listener would most likely identify that something is wrong. Therefore, the laws need not be written down anywhere as we can have direct and immediate knowledge of their violations in expressions.

ii. Logic is the principles guiding the operations of a mechanism. We were told that this description is informed by the fact that gadgets function according to the pre-designed codes or programs which control them. By this, no gadget such as computer, phone or watch can function beyond what it has been designed or programed for, otherwise, it would be said to be malfunctioning.

iii. Logic is the branch of philosophy that deals with the study of the basic principles, techniques or methods for evaluating arguments. We were told that logic is concerned with the nature of statements, how statements are combined to form arguments, the inferences that follow from the arrangement of statements in arguments as well as the determination of the validity or invalidity and soundness or unsoundness of such arguments. [58]

When talking about the value of logic to the individual, we should also remember that philosophy generally is basic to all areas of human inquiry, be it the basic sciences, the social sciences, the arts or humanities, but logic itself is the basis on which philosophy thrives. Just as philosophy deals with reasoning so does logic deal with the study of the proper way to reason. We should also note that as human beings we cannot escape philosophy just as we also cannot escape logic. Any person or society that rejects logical or sound philosophical principles runs into chaos and disorder. Therefore, knowledge of logic helps the individual to escape chaos and disorder. Logic is further relevant to the individual in the following ways:

1. **It Enhances Problem Solving Ability and Saves Time**: With the knowledge of logic, the individual is able to solve complex problems by breaking them down into a number of simpler problems. In this way, logic allows for precision in problem solving by doing away with irrelevant components of the problem thereby saving time. The individual can apply the knowledge of logic to a wide range of problems. The application of logic increases efficiency and makes the individual more effective in dealing with problems.

2. **It Enhances Reasoning Ability**: With the knowledge of logic, the individual is able to think in a systematic and organised manner. Logic equips the individual with the knowledge of distinguishing correct reasoning from incorrect or fallacious one. Logic is an important skill when analysing other people's opinions and beliefs for the purpose of ridding them of errors. When an individual cannot detect logical fallacies in what he or she sees, reads or hears, then he or she will be unable to discern what is true from what is wrong in the real world. In real life situations, we cannot underestimate the usefulness of logic as it puts us in a

[58] Francis Offor. 2014. *Essentials of Logic*. Revised Ed. Ibadan: BookWright Publishers. P.3.

position to better evaluate arguments and debates from domestic matters to political, religious and economic matters involving the wider society.

3. **It Helps the Individual to Avoid Unnecessary Conflicts:** Conflicts often result from misconceptions, misunderstandings, differences in orientation as well as from an outright abuse of persons. Individuals often move away from the content of an argument to directly attacking the opponent. In logic, this is known as *argumentum ad hominem* (abusive) otherwise referred to as 'argument against the man'. This could lead to serious conflict but knowledge of logic makes it clear to us that such an approach is fallacious and should be avoided. For example, 'Malik called Ade a dirty person. Mind you, Malik is an Hausa man and they are known to be very dirty'. This could lead to a serious conflict, as it is very unlikely that Malik would take such an abuse with a pinch of salt. Ad hominem (abusive) is a type of fallacy that plays out often on a daily basis. This is so because people tend to quickly discredit the claim of an inconsistent individual and even calling such an individual a hypocrite. The warning here is that the claim of an inconsistent person needs not be jettison on account of the person's known inconsistencies, rather, every claim should be evaluated on its own merit even if the author of the argument wears the toga of inconsistency. It may be convenient to say that the kettle is inconsistent by calling the pot black but this does not remove the fact that the pot is actually black. Therefore, an inconsistent person can, of course come up with a valid claim. By so doing, every arguer deserves a fair hearing anytime any day in argumentation otherwise, this could lead to conflict.[59]

## 3.3 Value of Ethics to the Individual

In module 4, unit 3, we said that ethics has a very close link with morality and that the idea of morality can be traced to when humans started living in societies and began to distinguish between good or acceptable and bad or unacceptable ways to relate with each other. We also said that **it is these acceptable and unacceptable ways that developed into customs, ways of life and codes of conduct of a people which now constitute the interest and subject matter of ethics.** Ethics was described as "a code or set of principles by which men live."[60] It is a branch of philosophy also known as moral philosophy that prescribes how men ought to behave and live the 'good life'. One value of ethics is that it guides the way we make moral judgements about anything. The way individuals or societies judge human actions to be either right or wrong shows the value they place on such actions. This is why we hear of taboos and we hear of praise or blameworthy actions. For an action to be judged wrong for example, it must have violated at least a part of the moral codes or laid down rules which usually attract blame or punishment. Other ways ethics is valuable to the individual include:

[59] Bewaji J. A, Adebileje A and Omosulu R. Eds.2014. Introduction to Philosophy and Logic. Ede: The Directorate of GSP, Redeemer's University. P.169.

[60] Popkin, R.H and Stroll, A. *Philosophy Made Simple*. London: W. H Allen. 1969. p.1.

1. **Ethics Prescribe the Standard for Peaceful Co-existence:** A life of morality is a necessity for human beings given the condition that humans coexist. Ethics prescribes the standards for moral life and human activities would be meaningless and purposeless without it. Ethics provides the basis upon which we make social progress. This is so because without ethics, we would be living a predatory life where the only rule would be the survival of the fittest. Ethics is a system of principles that helps us tell right from wrong and good from bad. Ethics can give real and practical guidance to our lives. Ethical values like honesty, trustworthiness, responsibility and the likes help guide us along a pathway to deal more effectively with moral issues by eliminating those behaviours that do not conform to our sense of right and wrong. It is all about the choices we make. We constantly face choices that affect the quality of our lives. We are aware that the choices that we make have consequences, both for ourselves and for others and we are also aware of our responsibility for our actions.

2. **The Study of Ethics helps us to be Humane in Our Actions**: The ability to reason at a greater capacity is what makes us different from other animals. Rationality helps us to put a limit to our actions with the consideration of how they affect other beings, in a manner in which other animals would not. Being humane means focusing on one's own humanity and the humanity of others. It means being interested in treating other people with respect and care just as one wants to be treated. It is generally expected that humans act in a humane manner. This is because unlike other animals, we have a rational choice either to be predatory and cruel or to be kindly and helpful to others. When a person shows indifference to the plights of others or treats people wickedly, we sometimes ask if the person is a human being. That is because being morally considerate is part of being human. Gopalkrishna Gandhi says that Hitler's torturing of his prisoners would shame Satan, if such a creature exists because he was as real as his poison gases and tooth-extractors. He added that Apartheid South Africa had its torturers trained in Algeria to inflict pain without leaving any signs on the body. Concluding that, the actions of Hitler and Apartheid South Africa were inhumane because they were heinous, brutish and lack morality.[61]

3. **Application of Ethical Principles is Therapeutic to the Individual:** In our everyday life, we are confronted with different and often difficult situations which require us to make moral evaluations that would lead to our choices. Experience has shown that in most cases, whenever we make immoral choices, we become unhappy and uncomfortable. However, when we do otherwise, the reverse is the case. No matter how unpopular or unfavourable our choices may be, provided they were the right choices, we tend to be happy, free and at peace with ourselves. Therefore, making the right moral decisions reduces stress. Ultimately, ethics is

[61] Gopalkrishna Gandhi. 2019. The importance of being humane. *The Hindu*. Retrieved from https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/the-importance-ofbeinghumane/article26314666.ece Accessed: 22/09/2019.

important because it improves our way of life. By being moral, we enrich our lives and the lives of those around us.

## 3.4 Value of Metaphysics to the Individual

In module 4, unit 4, Metaphysics is defined as a branch of philosophy that deals with fundamental questions about the nature of reality. From its etymology, metaphysics is said to be derived from the Greek word *meta-physika* meaning after physics or transcending the physical.[62] Among philosophers, we were told that the term metaphysical has come to have the distinct sense of having to do with what lies beyond what is visibly available to the senses. But in its simplest form, metaphysics represents a science that seeks ultimate knowledge of reality which broadly comprises the physical and the non-physical. Metaphysics as is generally understood therefore attempts to furnish us with knowledge of the physical reality and a reality transcending the world of science, common sense or the phenomenal world. One important value of metaphysics therefore is its ability to evaluate and furnish us with the knowledge of reality. Without an explanation or an interpretation of the world around us, we would be helpless in relating or dealing deal with reality. We would be unable to give any meaning to life and consequently see no reason for preserving it. The degree to which our metaphysical worldview is correct is the degree to which we are able to comprehend the world, and act accordingly. Other importance of metaphysics includes the following:

1. **It Exposes Man to the Fact that His Very Nature is Metaphysical**: As a discipline, metaphysics has an important value to man. Man practices metaphysics just as he breathes, without thinking about it. Man has often been defined as a metaphysical animal, which, apart from telling us that man is a reasoning animal, it strongly indicates the characteristic power of reason that involves looking beyond the empirical to the absolute. Man, therefore, from this standpoint, is by his very nature metaphysical. This means that there is in him something incapable of expression in simple natural terms, something which always goes beyond nature and which is to be described as spiritual.[63]

2. **It Prepares an Individual for the Responsibilities and Uncertainties of Life:** A belief in determinism or freewill gives an individual a certain orientation and outlook to life. Determinists believe that a human being's future is pre-ordained and is therefore beyond the individual's control or influence. People who hold this view are more likely to worry less and resign to fate. A belief in freewill on the other hand gives individuals a kind of outlook to life that makes them responsible for their actions and consequently, being able to chart the course of their future. Deciding whether one believes in determinism or freewill is important as it relates

[62] Kim, J. and E. Sosa. eds. 1995. *A Companion to Metaphysics*. London: Blackwell Publishers.
[63] Ochulor, Chinenye. Apebende, Stephen. Metuonu, Iheanacho. 2011. The Necessity of Metaphysics. American Journal of Social Issues & Humanities Vol.1 No.2. p.38.

to how we interact with the world and respond to events happening around us. Therefore, metaphysics prepares an individual for the responsibilities and uncertainties of life.

3. **It helps in the Clarification of Our Thoughts and Beliefs:** This is so because, when properly pursued, metaphysics enhances analytical and interpretive capacities that are applicable to any subject matter and in any human context. It cultivates in a person the capacities and appetite for self-expression and reflection, for sharing of ideas, for life-long learning, and for dealing with problems for which there are no easy answers.[64] The human mind contains thoughts by which we influence our personal life experiences. We may never be able to step outside of our own mind and look back upon it to see what it is like. However, we can infer from our experiences what is going on in our minds. The first thing most of us notice when we observe the workings of our mind are thoughts. The mind seems to be filled with them, constantly moving in and out and producing all manner of bodily effects. The study of metaphysics gives us better understanding of the workings of the mind. Thoughts with metaphysical orientations are inescapable part of human existence. Almost everyone has been puzzled from time to time by metaphysical questions like 'What is the meaning of life?', 'Did I have any existence before I was born?' and 'Is there life after death?' Most people have some kind of personal outlook on life in relation to the above questions. With the knowledge of metaphysics, people are able to clarify what they believe, and they can be stimulated to think about ultimate questions.[65]

## 4.0 Conclusion

The value of philosophy to the individual as have been shown in the course of this unit cannot be overemphasised. Epistemology puts the individual in a good position to better understand his or her world by clarifying his or her thoughts and shining the light of knowledge on uncertainties of life. With the knowledge of logic, the individual is able to solve complex problems by breaking them down into a number of simpler problems. Ethics shows that a life of morality is a necessity for human existence and coexistence, and metaphysics, a very important branch of philosophy prepares an individual for the responsibilities and uncertainties of life.

## 5.0 Summary

In this unit, we have been able to show the value of philosophy to the individual who studies it. This we did by examining the value of the various sub-branches of philosophy to the individual that studies them. Epistemology equips the individual with the

[64]Retrieved from http://www.philosophy.umn.edu/undergrad/ugfaq.html Accessed: 24/09/2019.
[65] Retrieved from http://www.unexplainable.net/infotheories/the_importance_of_philosophy_in_human_life_1182.php Accessed: 24/09/2019.

knowledge to understand and deal with the world. Logic helps the individual to avoid fallacies and unnecessary conflicts that may result from misconceptions and misunderstandings. Ethics helps the individual to imbibe principles for moral evaluations and acceptable ways of conduct, while metaphysics furnishes the individual with knowledge of the ultimate reality and with the capacity for dealing with problems for which there are no easy answers.

## 6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

- Mention some of the values of epistemology to the individual
- Does logic contribute anything meaningful to the life of an individual?
- Evaluate the values of ethics to the individual
- Discourse some of the values of metaphysics to the individual

## 7.0 References/Further Readings


Bewaji J. A, Adebileje A and Omosulu R. Eds.(2014) Introduction to Philosophy and Logic. Ede: The Directorate of GSP, Redeemer's University.

Offor F. (2014) *Essentials of Logic*. Revised Ed. Ibadan: BookWright Publishers.

Gopalkrishna Gandhi. (2019) The importance of being humane. *The Hindu*. Retrieved fromhttps://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/theimportanceofbeinghumane/article26314666. ece Accessed: 22/09/2019.

Kim, J. and E. Sosa. eds. (1995) *A Companion to Metaphysics*. London: Blackwell Publishers.

Ochulor, Chinenye. Apebende, Stephen. Metuonu, Iheanacho. (2011)The Necessity of Metaphysics. American Journal of Social Issues & Humanities Vol.1 No.2.

Popkin, R.H and Stroll, A. (1969) *Philosophy Made Simple*. London: W. H Allen.

## UNIT 2: THE VALUE OF PHILOSOPHY TO OTHER DISCIPLINES

### Contents



### 1.0 Introduction

Having discussed the value of philosophy to the individual who studies it in unit one, we shall in this unit examine the value of philosophy to other disciplines such as law, education, religion and business. In time past, all humans' information of the world and of themselves were grouped under philosophy. As this body of knowledge expanded, however, it was broken down and specific disciplines took their root from there. This is how medicine, physics, biology, sociology, psychology, law and the likes gained their divorce from philosophy and philosophy came to be known as the mother of all disciplines. This idea was aptly expressed by Descartes, who compared philosophy to a tree with metaphysics as its roots, physics as its trunk and all the other sciences comprised in the three main disciplines of medicine, mechanics and ethics as its branches. Another reason why philosophy is described as the mother of all disciplines is because no theory in science, art, socio-political or any other discipline performs the highest role of creating a worldview and methodology. This is an area to which philosophy is specifically privileged as it deals not only with the relationships between humans and the universe, but also with principles, categories and laws, revealing the place of humans in the world and their relation to the world. For this reason, the notions of worldview and methodology are not parts but functions of philosophy.[66]

Harry Schofield's narration of how Philosophy came to be known as the mother of all disciplines is a little more interesting. He noted that, at different times, Philosophy brought forth offspring. These were called science, theology, history, mathematics and each of these 'children of philosophy' gathered a store of knowledge of his own. Ultimately, when their store of knowledge was great, Philosophy called her children to

[66] Bertrand Russell. 1962. History of Western Philosophy. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd. p. 13

her and asked them to show her what knowledge they had discovered. Being older, and wiser than her children, she was able to derive great meaning from what knowledge each provided. She herself acquired no factual knowledge, but, by putting side-by-side all the knowledge that her children brought to her, she was able to develop an overall understanding of all the variables. Sometimes there were gaps in the overall pattern. On such occasions, Philosophy did not produce knowledge of her own or criticise her offspring for providing her with insufficient information. Instead, she made suggestions that would fill in the gaps and interpretations that would provide greater coherence in the picture.[67]

## 2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

By the end of this unit, you would be able to;

- Discuss the value of philosophy to law
- Enumerate the relevance of philosophy to education
- Explain the value of philosophy to religion
- Identify the importance of philosophy to business

## 3.0 Main Content

### 3.1 Value of Philosophy to Law

There are many distinctions between ethics and laws. Ethics comes from people's awareness of what is right and what is wrong while laws are written and approved by governments. It means that ethics may vary from people to people because different people may have different opinions on a certain issue, but laws describe clearly, what is illegal no matter what people think. To some extent, just like philosophy, the definition of ethics is not conclusive but laws are defined and precise. An action can be legal, but morally wrong. For example, the racial discrimination of apartheid South Africa was backed by law and was considered to be legally right but at the same time, it was immoral. In the same way, mercy killing may be illegal in certain countries but considered moral given certain conditions. Some of the ways philosophy is relevant to law are:

1. **Philosophy will help a Lawyer to Reason Clearly:** The value of philosophy to the lawyer cannot be over emphasised. Philosophy will help him or her to reason clearly, express him or herself precisely and to put his or her thoughts across to the audience firmly. Philosophy will teach the lawyer how to detect bad argument and identify the fallacies in it. Philosophy makes a lawyer to notice the difference between a true statement and a false one, a validity argument and an invalidity one as well as a sound argument and an unsound one. It is not enough for a lawyer to

[67] Harry Schofield. 1972. The Philosophy of Education: An Introduction. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd. p.8

master the facts of his case and the laws backing it, it is also important for him to present his argument in a logical manner. This is where philosophy comes in to assist him to achieve his professional responsibilities.

2. **Philosophy acts as Gadfly to the Enterprise of Law:** Philosophy focuses on the analysis of the concept, purpose and meaning of law, and the validity and morality of such laws. **It is part of the vocation of the sub-discipline of philosophy called philosophy of law to investigate the boundaries and limits of laws and the need to have a good understanding of the relationship between law and other bodies of norms.** Philosophy of law also studies reasoning or logic behind rules and principles, thereby underscoring the importance of logic to the legal enterprise. This is because a legal system that operates without coherence and consistency, but with obvious contradictions and multiple standards cannot lay claim to justice, and therefore cannot promote social stability or order.[68]

3. **Philosophy Seeks to Provide a General Account of the Nature of Law:** The account is general in the sense of targeting universal features of law that hold at all times and places. It does this through the tools of conceptual analysis. Whereas lawyers are interested in what the law is on a specific issue in a specific jurisdiction, philosophers of law are interested in identifying the features of law shared across cultures, times, and places. Taken together, these foundational features of law offer the kind of universal definition philosophers are after.

## 3.2 Value of Philosophy of Education

Ikuli and Ojimba gave a general view of the relationship between philosophy and education thus: Philosophy determines the direction towards which education has to go. It inspires educational theory as well as practice. Thus, education is the laboratory in which philosophic distinctions become concrete and are tested. Philosophy is wisdom and education transmits that wisdom from one generation to another. Philosophy represents a system of thought, while education embraces that thought in the content of instruction. Furthermore, while philosophy embodies a way of life, education represents the preparation for life. Philosophy is the knowledge obtained through natural reason, while education is the development of that reason as well as other powers of the mind. Every aspect of education has a philosophical base. Philosophy provides aims for education and these aims determine the curriculum, the methods of teaching as well as the school discipline. Furthermore, great philosophers have been great educationists. Philosophers like Aristotle, Plato, Gandhi and many more have been great educators. They reflect their philosophical views in their educational schemes. Socrates, for instance, has given the world his Socratic method of questioning and cross-questioning. His philosophical views

[68] Olu-Owolabi, K. A. 2004. Philosophy and Other Disciplines. In Philosophy and Logic: A Critical Introduction. Ibadan: the General Studies Programme Unit (GSP). P.53.

reflect in his educational scheme.[69] Other ways in which philosophy is important to education are;

1. **Students Get Great Benefits from Learning Philosophy**: The tools taught by philosophy are of great use in employment as well as in further education. Even though the questions usually asked by philosophers are abstract, the tools philosophy teaches tend to be highly sought-after by employers. Philosophy students learn how to write clearly, and to read closely, with a critical eye. They are taught to spot bad reasoning and to avoid it in their writings and in their works.

2. **Philosophy enhances the Students' Cognitive Abilities:** According to James Wallace Gray, there is some scientific evidence that philosophy can benefit people in many ways. He stated that statistics have shown that philosophy majors do well in a variety of standardized tests and that even children around the age of ten were found to have benefited from philosophy in their education. He went on to say that one hundred and five children in the penultimate year of primary school aged approximately ten years were given one hour per week of philosophical-inquiry based lessons for 16 months compared with 72 control children. The result was that the philosophy children showed significant improvements on tests of their verbal, numerical and spatial abilities at the end of the 16-month period relative to their baseline performance before the study. After two years, these same children were made to go through cognitive abilities test at a time the children were nearly at the end of their second year of secondary school. He noted that the children had not had any further philosophy-based lessons but the benefits of their early experience of philosophy persisted. He confirmed that the 71 philosophy-taught children who the researchers were able to track down showed the same cognitive test scores as they had done two years earlier and by contrast, 44 control children who did not take the philosophical-inquiry based lessons actually showed a trend towards a deterioration in their inferior scores from two years earlier.[70]

3. **Philosophy Introduces the Concept of Morality to Education**: Education is a process of socialisation through which the child internalises the basic cultural values, mores and essential tools that will aid the child to survive sustainably in the society. Therefore, if education is to fulfil its purpose of catering for some aspects of human needs in the society, it is important that it should be given a touch of morality. According to Ekanem and Ekefre, the necessity and inseparability of morality in education can be seen in Rousseau's responses to whether the arts and the sciences have been beneficial to humanity. Rousseau in

[69] Bruno Yammeluan Ikuli and Anthony C. Ojimba .2018. Philosophy and Education: The Engines of National Development Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion. Vol.37.p.31.

[70] James Wallace Gray. 2012. Eleven Reasons Why Philosophy is Important. P.7. https://ethicalrealism.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/11-reasons-philosophy-is-important.pdf

one of his famous essays responded in the negative when he said: since learned men began to appear among us, good men have disappeared. What Rousseau alluded in his response is the fact that the education of those 'learned men' was devoid of morality. As a result of lack of morality in the education of these 'learned men' their education was not beneficial to mankind since it could not fulfil the purpose of catering for the needs of human nature. In addition, education is an intentional activity. The entire process of planning and implementation of education is structured or designed purposefully and it is made to be futuristic. This intentionality and purposefulness made education to be value-driven. This explains the fact that educational ends are driven, and are expressed by what we value as individuals and as a group in the society. Human beings are not just products of biological reproduction, but are indeed moral and cultural.[71]

### 3.3. Value of Philosophy of Religion

Philosophy in relating with religion is interested in subjecting religious beliefs, rites, attitudes and modes of experiences to rational criticisms, with the aim of offering justifications for them. Since beliefs invariably determine rites, moral attitudes and modes of experience, Inagbor and Osarhiemen are of the view that philosophers of religion have largely focussed on beliefs that are doctrinal in nature. They believe that philosophers seek to establish what might be called the metaphysical background of the doctrinal system of particular religions which focused on worldviews, ultimate sources and nature of the universe, the nature of man and his place in the universe as well as the ultimate end of man. The views of the above scholars on the positive values of philosophy to religion can be summarised thus;

1. Philosophers of religion seek to justify the place and relevance of religion in the world. They are overly optimistic about the capabilities of human reason and of religion itself, although some other scholars admit that there might well be aspects of religion that reason cannot justify because it is not sufficiently equipped to probe them.

2. Another point is that philosophers of religion whose orientation is deterministic see the world as already completely emancipated. For this reason, there is no prospect in criticising or defending it. All that needs to be done is to merely investigate religion, to describe and compare its realities without making value judgements.

3. There is yet another point which seems not to recognise anything good in religion in that religion has been nothing less than a potent force for conflict in

[71]Ekanem, S. A. and Ekefre, E. N. 2014. The Importance of Philosophy in Educational Administration/Management: The Democratic Mode. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences.* Vol 5 No 9. P.502.

the society all through history. While this is partly true, it must be stated that some good enjoyed by man are attributable to religion.[72]

4. Philosophy of religion is very important to religion as a discipline and this is not unconnected with the fact that philosophy, as have been said, is the mother of all disciplines. Philosophy of religion could change the way we view religious matters in a positive manner. This is because it impacts our worldviews and religion forms a very important part of that worldview. Philosophy of religion raises questions about the origin of the world and of everything in it, including ourselves. Without philosophy, we may take every dogma as a truth and never question anything. The mind needs to expand to see beyond what is merely believed and philosophy encourages one to question all religious assumptions in search of credible justifications.

## 3.4 Value of Philosophy of Business

The relationship between philosophy and business is often linked, but not limited to ethics. Business is a set of interrelated activities or any lawful activity engaged in or carried on with the view of making profit. The basic economic unit in which this set of activities is performed is the business enterprise. **Therefore, it is imperative to define the business enterprise as an organisational context within which men, ideas, materials and machines and other resources are harnessed and combined for the purpose of providing needed goods and services, in order to make profit and remain in existence.**[73]

In other to achieve the intentions of any business, one basic objective is to establish a proper structure that defines the rules and responsibilities when it comes to recruitment and job description within the context of the business enterprise. It is however important to note that unless the employees and employers of business enterprise demonstrate the appropriate ethical behaviour in the execution of assigned duties, ultimately, enhancing the corporate image of the business outfit in the environment will be difficult. Employees who demonstrate unethical behaviours do not promote the well-being of the organisation and therefore, unless such a negative behaviour is jettisoned, it becomes impossible for them to make the desired contributions. This is where the role of philosophy from the perspective of ethics becomes very significant. Ethics as we already know refers to "a code or set of principles by which men live."[74] It is a branch of philosophy, also known as moral philosophy that prescribes how men ought to behave and live the 'good life'. However, business ethics has to do with the

[72] Oyelade, E. O. Ed. 2006. Readings in Religion and Philosophy. Benin-City: TTE TEREDIA Publications. Pp. 219-220.

[73] Agbonifoh, B. A. 1999. Business Ethics. In A. U. Inegbenebor and B. E Osaze. Introduction to Business. Lagos: Malthouse Press Ltd. p.174.

[74] Popkin, R.H and Stroll, A. *Philosophy Made Simple*. London: W. H Allen. 1969. p.1.

study of what constitutes right and wrong, or good and bad human conduct in any business environment. These right and wrong or good and bad conducts make up the codes of ethics of any particular business. In Jones' view, codes of ethics are "formal standards and rules based on beliefs about right or wrong that managers can use to help themselves make appropriate decisions with regard to the interests of their stakeholders".[75]

The following have been identified by Michael Josephson as ethical principles for business organizations[76]

i. **Honesty**: Individual should be honest and truthful in all their dealings and they should not deliberately mislead or deceive others through misrepresentations, overstatements, partial truths, selective omissions, or any other means.

ii. **Integrity**: They should demonstrate personal integrity and the courage of their convictions by doing what they think is right even when there is great pressure to do otherwise; they should be principled, honorable and upright; they should fight for their beliefs and not sacrifice principle for expediency or be hypocritical or unscrupulous.

iii. **Promise-Keeping and Trustworthiness:** They should be worthy of trust. They should be candid and forthcoming in supplying relevant information and correcting misapprehensions of fact, and they should make every reasonable effort to fulfill the letter and spirit of their promises and commitments. They should not interpret agreements in an unreasonably technical or legalistic manner in order to rationalize non-compliance or create justifications for escaping their commitments.

iv. **Loyalty:** They should be worthy of trust, demonstrate fidelity and loyalty to persons and institutions by friendship in adversity, support and devotion to duty; they should not use or disclose information learned in confidence for personal advantage. They should safeguard the ability to make independent professional judgments by scrupulously avoiding undue influences and conflicts of interest. They should be loyal to their companies and colleagues and if they decide to accept other employment, they should provide reasonable notice, respect the proprietary information of their former employer, and refuse to engage in any activities that take undue advantage of their previous positions.

v. **Fairness:** They should be fair and just in all dealings; they should not exercise power arbitrarily, and should not use overreaching nor indecent means to gain or

[75] Jones, G. R. George, J. M, and Hill, C. W. L. 2000. Contemporary Management, 2nd ed. New York: Irwin McGraw-Hill.p.147.

[76] Michael Josephson. 12 Ethical Principles for Business Executives. Josephson's Institute Exemplary Leadership and Business Ethics. Retrieved from https://josephsononbusinessethics.com/2010/12/12-ethical-principles-for-business-executives/ Accessed: 27/09/2019.

maintain any advantage nor take undue advantage of another's mistakes or difficulties. They should be fair, manifest a commitment to justice, equal treatment of individuals, tolerance for and acceptance of diversity and open-minded.

vi. **Concern for Others**: They should be caring, compassionate, benevolent and kind; they, like the Golden Rule, should help those in need, and seek to accomplish their business objectives in a manner that causes the least harm and the greatest positive good.

vii. **Respect for Others**: They should demonstrate respect for human dignity, autonomy, privacy, rights, and interests of all those who have a stake in their decisions; they should be courteous and treat all people with equal respect and dignity regardless of sex, race or national origin.

viii. **Law Abiding:** They should abide by laws, rules and regulations relating to their business activities.

ix. **Commitment to Excellence:** They should pursue excellence in performing their duties, be well informed, prepared, and constantly endeavour to increase their proficiency in all areas of responsibility.

x. **Leadership:** They should be conscious of the responsibilities and opportunities of their position of leadership and seek to be positive ethical role models by their own conduct and by helping to create an environment in which principled-reasoning and ethical decision-making are highly prized.

xi. **Reputation and Morale:** They should seek to protect and build the company's good reputation and the morale of its employees by engaging in no conduct that might undermine respect and by taking whatever actions are necessary to correct or prevent inappropriate conduct of others.

xii. **Accountability**: They should acknowledge and accept personal accountability for the ethical quality of their decisions and omissions to themselves, their colleagues, their companies, and their communities.

## 4.0 Conclusion

In relation to law, we have said that it is not enough for a lawyer to master the facts of his case and the laws backing it, but that it is also important for him or her to present his or her argument in a logical manner. This is where philosophy comes to play its role. In education, Philosophy teaches students how to write clearly, and to read closely with a critical eye, for the purpose of spotting bad reasoning. In religion we noted that philosophy seeks to justify the place and relevance of religion in the world and in business, philosophy teaches how to be fair, manifest a commitment to justice, equal treatment of individuals, tolerance for and acceptance of diversity and open-mindedness.

## 4.0 Summary

In this unit, we have been able to show that philosophy acts as gadfly to the enterprise of law by cubing its excesses. We noted that if education is to fulfil its purpose of catering for some aspects of human needs in the society, it is important that it should be given a touch of morality. We also said that philosophy of religion could change the way we view religious matters in a positive manner because it impacts our worldviews and religion forms a very important part of that worldview. Finally, we have been able to show that, business ethics has to do with the study of what constitutes right and wrong, or good and bad human conduct in any business environment and that these right and wrong or good and bad conducts make up the codes of ethics of any particular business.

## 6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

- In what way is philosophy relevant to law?
- Enumerate the values of philosophy to education
- Briefly describe the importance of philosophy to religion
- List and explain six ethical principles for business organizations
- In what way can philosophy be of help to business enterprises?

## 7.0 References/Further Readings


Agbonifoh, B. A. 1999. Business Ethics. In A. U. Inegbenebor and B. E Osaze. Introduction to Business. Lagos: Malthouse Press Ltd.

Bertrand Russell. 1962. History of Western Philosophy. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd.

Bruno Yammeluan Ikuli and Anthony C. Ojimba .2018. Philosophy and Education: The Engines of National Development Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion. Vol.37.

Ekanem, S. A. and Ekefre, E. N. 2014. The Importance of Philosophy in Educational Administration/Management: The Democratic Mode. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences.* Vol 5 No 9.

Harry Schofield. 1972. The Philosophy of Education: An Introduction. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd.

James Wallace Gray. 2012. Eleven Reasons Why Philosophy is Important. https://ethicalrealism.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/11-reasons-philosophy-is-important.pdf

Jones, G. R. George, J. M, and Hill, C. W. L. 2000. Contemporary Management, 2nd ed. New York: Irwin McGraw-Hill.

Michael Josephson. 12 Ethical Principles for Business Executives. Josephson's Institute Exemplary Leadership and Business Ethics. Retrieved from

https://josephsononbusinessethics.com/2010/12/12- ethical-principles-for-business-executives/ Accessed: 27/09/2019.
Olu-Owolabi, K. A. 2004. Philosophy and Other Disciplines. In Philosophy and Logic: A Critical Introduction. Ibadan: the General Studies Programme Unit (GSP).
Oyelade, E. O. Ed. 2006. Readings in Religion and Philosophy. Benin-City: TTE TEREDIA Publications.
Popkin, R.H and Stroll, A. (1969) *Philosophy Made Simple*. London: W. H Allen..

## UNIT 3: THE VALUE OF PHILOSOPHY TO THE SOCIETY

**Contents**



### 1.0 Introduction

Welcome to this discussion on the value of philosophy to the society. Like we did in unit one, we shall be discussing the value of philosophy to the society by examining the importance of the four cardinal branches of philosophy to the society at large. Suffice it to say that the value of philosophy to the society at large is a function of how the various branches of philosophy have benefitted individual members of society who studied them. In the opinion of Bertrand Russell, the man who has no tincture of philosophy goes through life imprisoned in the prejudices derived from common sense, from the habitual beliefs of his age or his nation, and from convictions which have grown up in his mind without the cooperation or consent of his deliberate reason. To such a man Russell says, the world tends to become definite, finite and obvious as common objects rouse no questions and unfamiliar possibilities are contemptuously rejected. Imagine a society populated by such individuals! As soon as we begin to philosophise, however, we find out that even the most common things of life raise problems to which only very incomplete answers can be given. Philosophy, though unable to tell us with certainty

what the true answer to the doubts it raises are, it is, however, able to suggest many possibilities which enlarge our thoughts and free them from the tyranny of custom.[77]

All things around us as social beings are related or connected to every other thing else in some way or another weather we are conscious of it or not. Philosophy is vested with the responsibility of being that discipline which looks into the basic foundations of things as well as of social relations. No matter how ignorant people may be concerning the enterprise of philosophy, they without notice, order their everyday affairs with philosophical principles. Philosophy is inevitably at the heart of the formation of any society. When a society is positively guided by philosophical principles, the results are usually seen in form of order, progress and development. However, when this is not the case, then it is as a result of a misuse of philosophy. Philosophy does this ordering of society through its various branches as explained later in module 4. Every branch of philosophy is concerned in one way or another, directly or indirectly with particular problems of human experience. Our interest in this unit is to look into those areas where philosophy has impacted the society through it various branches.

## 2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

By the end of this unit, you would be able to;

- State the value of Epistemology to the Society
- Identify the importance of Logic to the Society
- Show the relevance of Ethics to the Society
- Enunciate the importance of Metaphysics to the Society

## 3.0 Main Content

### 3.1 Value of Epistemology to the Society

1. **Epistemology has led to Advancements in Human Knowledge**: Epistemology is at the basis of the scientific method and by implication, a form of science. The first people to use the scientific method were philosophers who were then, known as natural philosophers. These natural philosophers were majorly epistemologists who made the assumption that through observation of the world we can arrive at some basic truths about the world. They were able to make this claim as a result of the regular patterns they observed around them and how everything seemed to happen in an orderly and almost regular form. Most of the epistemic assumptions they made have been challenged time and again, but this is what makes all scientific discoveries possible. Epistemologists were the first set of intellectuals to ask basic questions about how our senses could be trusted to make discoveries

[77] Bertrand Russell. 1912. The Value of Philosophy.p.30 In Chapter 15 of The Problems of Philosophy. Retrieved from http://brobinson.info/courses/intro/RussellValue%20of%20Philosophy.pdf Accessed: 24/09/2019.

about the world around us. Therefore, epistemology essentially gave rise to science and has remained one of the most important philosophical endeavours that questions the legitimacy of all knowledge claims made about society.

2. **Epistemology Frees the Society from the Tyranny of Custom:** A lot of people go about in life without asking questions and seeking true knowledge about their customs, beliefs and practices. Customs and traditions should not be approached as dogmas as they are subject to modification and are meant to serve certain purposes in the society. Therefore, as societies evolve, certain practices become irrelevant and contribute nothing meaningful to the life of the people. Epistemology helps a people to ask basic questions which prompt them to evaluate their belief system to see if they are worth preserving. For example, it will be a display of lack of knowledge for a society which used to be agrarian and for that reason, encouraged polygamy for the purpose of raising many children who would grow up to work in the farms to continue to hold on to such a practice even when industrialisation has taken over and the people now engage in white collar jobs. Epistemology makes knowledge available and frees a people from unjustified customs and practices.

3. **The Challenge of Sceptics in the Society Leads to Social Development**: In the tradition of epistemology, the skeptics are known to constantly challenge whatever knowledge claim we put out there, because they are interested in knowing whether we can be certain about anything. It is for this reason that there is a sense in which the entire project of epistemology is an attempt to meet this skeptical challenge by proving that knowledge is possible. Skepticism as an idea connotes the critical spirit, the tendency of not being easily satisfied with superficial evidence and striving to accept only incorrigible beliefs that are absolutely certain. **A skeptic will raise questions about social claims, be it religious, cultural or economic. They put social theorists, political leaders, traditional rulers and religious leaders on their toes, thereby strengthening the ideas that lead to social development.** Philosophy, therefore, has brought about several social changes, defined by Abakare and Okeke as any form of alteration in the social order of the society. They believe it is a kind of paradigm shift where obsolete social ideas give way for new and better ones. However, such changes hardly take place without the sceptical challenge. The basis of social change is the transformation in the thought processes of the human person. Knowledge of epistemology brings about new approaches to issues. This is possible because sceptics awaken the society from their mythological and dogmatic slumber; they help to sharpen the minds of the people and liberate them from the shackles of prejudices and sentiments. They make the society aware that they can question certain cultures and traditions that are antithetical to reason and that such practices that are not in tandem with reason are to be discarded or modified. This is where the illumination of philosophy through epistemology shines and brings about social change by

providing the people with the intellectual disposition and stamina to jettison varied superstitious beliefs in their society.[78]

## 3.2 Value of Logic to the Society

1. **It Cultivates Sound Minds in the Members of the Society**: The different ideologies of people in the society are informed by the way they think. The thinking processes of people can have various impacts on the society leading to changes in laws, economic systems and even war as well as overthrow of governments. Ikuli and Ojimba are of the opinion that philosophy (and logic in particular) has been the catalysts to the development of any nation. This is, because, every society requires critical minds and trained intelligence to chart the cause of its past, present and future, as well as harness the available resources for maximum development. Logic guides a nation in understanding itself and in acquisition of concrete outlook on life and of its proximate and ultimate ends. They believe that logic seeks to establish for the nation, a scale of values for the conduct of its people. In addition, it stimulates the fullest power of man to think rationally and eliminate emotional and irrational approach to situations by inculcating the habit of clear, exact, logical and critical thinking. To this extent, it cultivates sound minds in the society and a developed society is nothing but a congregation of sound minds. Thus, it serves as a navigating life compass for any nation and instils in its members, the right attitude needed for development.[79]

2. **It helps in the Resolution of Conflicts**: Misunderstandings and conflicts can result from unclear and imprecise expression of desires which sooner or later can lead to more serious problems like chaos and wars between peoples and nations. Most dilemmas between friends, family members and other member of society result from ignorance on the proper usage of language. These and many other problems confronting today's society could have been solved, even before they commenced if only people learn how to study the structure of arguments and ascertain its validity and truthfulness. Indeed, the study Logic is a very vital necessity which could lead to a more vivid, harmonious and progressive future. These are some of the numerous good reasons why it is helpful to study logic. Logic allows people to improve the quality of the arguments that they create. When we make rational arguments, we are apt to convince other people to agree

[78]Abakare, C. O. and V. C, Okeke. 2016. Philosophy in Contemporary Time: Relevance Vs. Public Perception. Mgbakoigba, Journal of African Studies. Vol.6 No.1.p.10

[79] Bruno Yammeluan Ikuli and Anthony C. Ojimba .2018. Philosophy and Education: The Engines of National Development Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion. Vol.37.p.31.

with our claims and people are much less likely to believe that we have a valid point when we give them accurate and logical justifications.[80]

3. **Logic helps in Detecting Fake News:** We presently live in society that is saturated by media information, especially the social media, where we are constantly being bombarded on all sides by unsubstantiated and sometimes, doctored information all in an effort to draw media traffic for selfish gains. Politicians, advertisers, media persons and even private individuals are all trying to convince people online to buy what they are selling. It is also the case that a lot of fake enterprises are taking place online with the sole aim of defrauding the innocent and uncritical minds. The impact of fake news in the society has turned trust into a very scarce commodity. Relationships are built on one fundamental principle, and that principle is trust. However, the erosion of morals has affected the level of trust between people. This is pervasive and everything from friendships to business transactions is severely constricted. The society can only rely on the knowledge of logic to navigate their ways out of the uncertainties presented by the media. Logic is the science of how to evaluate arguments and reasoning, and critical thinking is a process of evaluation that uses logic to separate truth from falsehood, and reasonable from unreasonable beliefs. If you want to better evaluate the various claims, ideas and arguments you encounter, you need a better understanding of basic logic and the process of critical thinking. Logic is not a matter of opinion, when it comes to evaluating arguments, there are specific principles and criteria that logic affords us. This is important because sometimes people do not realise that what sounds reasonable is not necessarily logical.[81]

## 3.3 Value of Ethics to the Society

1. **Ethics Promotes Peaceful Coexistences Among People**: We need to be ethical because it defines who we are as individuals in particular and as a society in general. There are norms of behaviour that are prescribed for everyone to follow and the society could fall into chaos if we accept that each person could pick and choose what he or she feels is the right thing to do. In such a situation, some people may lie, others may not keep their promises, some others may act irresponsibly by engaging in harmful acts and claim that they have the freedom to so do. This form of behaviour is capable of tearing the people apart and breaking down any form of healthy relationship they may have had. It is imperative to add here that, there is nothing wrong with pursuing one's own interests. However, an

[80] "The Importance of Logic And Language." All Answers Ltd. ukessays.com, November 2018. Web. 26 September 2019. <https://www.ukessays.com/essays/philosophy/he-importance-of-logic-and-language-philosophy-essay.php?vref=1>.
[81] Austin Cline. 2018. The Importance of Logic and Philosophy. https://www.learnreligions.com/the-importance-of-logic-and-philosophy-3975201

ethical person must be willing at least sometimes to place the interests of others ahead of self-interest. This is because we have a social responsibility to do so. It is in the preservation of the interest of others that we sometimes guarantee our own interests. When we help make the society better, we are rewarded with also making better our own lives and the lives of our families and friends. Without moral conduct, society would be a miserable place.[82]

2. **Without Ethics, Our Society Would be One of Dishonesty**: The role of ethics in our society is very important because it is the custodian of the basic beliefs and standards that make things to run in an orderly manner. Ethics is necessary in all organisations and institutions, be it political, economic, legal or religious. Ethics is what gives us comfort knowing that we live in a society where we are able to make choices. It is as a result of our belief that doctors would act in an ethical manner that makes us feel comfortable putting our lives in their hands. Without ethics, some doctors may knowingly misdiagnose their patients just for the sake of financial gains rather than for the persons' health and well-being. In today's society, laws and contracts are enforced to make sure that business deals are fair and that the both parties involved will keep to their part of the contract. Without any application of ethics, our society would be one of dishonesty and uncertainty. Asike noted that, through critical and reflective methods as well as moral theories of analysis, ethics helps the state to formulate its public policies, adding that, ethical research is a must for social, economic, political and technological advancement of any nation. When, therefore, we talk of national development, we have to remind ourselves that the nation is only real and concrete in terms of people that constitute it. The role of ethics, therefore, in the moulding of the character of the individuals is crucial to the overall development of the society.

3. **Ethics forms the Foundation of Social Laws**: Laws are made based on moral values which prescribe the basic minimum standards of human behaviour in a particular society.Both laws and ethics are systems which maintain a set of moral values and prevent people from violating them. But it should be noted that ethics is basic to the formulation of laws in such a way that any law that do not uphold ethical principles is described as immoral. Ethics aids social laws in fulfilling the purpose of making people benefit from being members of a well-regulated society. Another important way through which ethics impacts social laws is in the recognition of human rights. Human rights are the basic rights and freedoms that belong to every person in the world, from birth until death. They apply, regardless of where a person is from. They can never be taken away, although they can sometimes be restricted when a person breaks the law or in the interests of national security. These basic rights are based on shared values like dignity, fairness, equality, respect and independence and are protected by law. The United Nations

[82] https://opentextbc.ca/ethicsinlawenforcement/chapter/1-1-the-importance-of-ethical-behavior/

has defined a broad range of internationally accepted rights, including civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights, and has established mechanisms to promote and protect these rights and to assist states in carrying out their responsibilities.[83]

### 3.4 Value of Metaphysics to the Society

Ochulor noted that the overwhelming relevance of metaphysics to the society makes it unreasonable to radically reject it. Once we accept the distinction between appearance and reality, and realize that things are not always the way they appear to us, then the role and value of metaphysics becomes evident. Once we accept that man is not purely and exclusively material, that there are immaterial elements in his being, then we would be able to understand man's irresistible urge to go beyond the physical realm of human life and experience, and strive for the spiritual realm through metaphysics. Even Immanuel Kant, who was himself a thorough critic of metaphysics, still had to admit that the human being has a natural and irresistible tendency towards metaphysics.[84] Some of other values of metaphysics to the society are;

1. **It is Inclusive and Integrative**: From an African perspective, the concept of reality encompasses the totality of everything that exists: visible or invincible, actual or potential. This metaphysical system does not ultimately separate the mind from the body, neither does it separate subject from object. In this manner, there is no distinction between religion and culture and no separation of spirituality from existence or existence from the totality of life. It is referred to as an inclusive system and therefore integrative. African metaphysics teaches us to be accommodating and tolerant as it associates rather than dissociates entities.

2. **Social Values are Dependent on Metaphysical Principles:** We may be familiar with the popular saying that 'the spiritual (metaphysical) controls the physical'. This is simply a way of saying that physical realities are backed by metaphysical laws which may not be empirically visible to us. Humans are guided in life by certain practical philosophical principles, which may be embodied in an established religious system or remain purely ethical and personal. Ultimately, all such philosophical principles are based upon metaphysical principles. Therefore, whether we are aware of it or not, the principles which govern the way we want to live and act ultimately depend upon certain metaphysical principles.[85]

3. **Metaphysics Influences Social Lifestyle**: Metaphysics is one of the core branches of philosophy and has had much to do with influencing people's attitude to life and bringing about changes in societies. The metaphysics of Socrates and Aristotle

[83] https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/human-rights/

[84] Ochulor, Chinenye. Apebende, Stephen. Metuonu, Iheanacho. 2011.The Necessity Of Metaphysics. American Journal of Social Issues & Humanities Vol.1 No.2. p.38.

[85] Ochulor, Chinenye. Apebende, Stephen. Metuonu, Iheanacho. 2011.The Necessity Of Metaphysics. American Journal of Social Issues & Humanities Vol.1 No.2. p.42.

were certainly not pure abstractions that had nothing to do with the practical lives of people. Likewise, Plato's metaphysics was not irrelevant to practical life. On the contrary, it gave generations of humans a definite worldview which influenced their lifestyles. Plato's world-view changed their attitudes towards life and led to their less emphasis on temporal material things with focus on eternal immaterial substances. Through the influence of Plato's metaphysics, the things of this world came to be seen in a new light which encouraged simplicity. Also, the metaphysical issue of whether or not there is a mind or soul and of its final destination has implications for how we relate with one another in society. This metaphysical belief is at the foundation of most religions which themselves are agents of social cohesion and development.

## 4.0 Conclusion

The value of philosophy to the society has been looked into from the perspectives of the various branches of philosophy. Epistemology is unarguably the first intellectual domain to ask basic questions about how our senses could be trusted to make discoveries about the world around us. It asks questions about knowledge and the reliability of the human senses. Therefore, epistemology essentially gave rise to science and is one of the most important philosophical endeavours that questions the legitimacy of all knowledge claims made in society. Logic in contributing to social development, guides a nation in understanding itself and in acquisition of concrete outlook on life and of its proximate and ultimate ends. Logic seeks to establish for the nation, a scale of values for the conduct of its people. In addition, it stimulates the fullest power of individual to think rationally and eliminate emotional and irrational approach to situations by inculcating the habit of clear, exact, logical and straight thinking. Ethics from what has been said so far defines who we are as individuals in particular and as a society in general. The norms of behaviour that are prescribed for everyone to follow are necessary for social integration. In metaphysics from an African perspective, we recognised that it teaches us to be accommodating and tolerant as it associates rather than dissociates entities.

## 5.0 Summary

We have been able to show that the knowledge of epistemology brings about new approaches to issues in the society. This is possible because sceptics awaken the society from their mythological and dogmatic slumber as they help to sharpen the minds of the people and liberate them from the shackles of prejudices and sentiments. We also stated that logic helps us to detect and avoid fake news as the impact of fake news in the society has turned trust into a very scarce commodity. With respect to ethics, we drew our attention to the fact that it forms the foundation of social laws and that laws are made based on moral values of a particular society. In line with this, ethics is said to aid social laws in fulfilling the purpose of making people benefit from being members of a well-regulated society. Finally, we said that whether we are aware of it or not, the principles

which govern the way we want to live and act ultimately depend upon metaphysical principles.

## 6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

- What would you consider to be the importance of Epistemology to the Society?
- What values would the study of Logic bring to the Society?
- Outline some of the benefits of Ethics to the Society
- Does Metaphysics contribute anything meaningful to the Society?

## 7.0 References/Further Readings


Austin Cline. 2018. The Importance of Logic and Philosophy. https://www.learnreligions.com/the-importance-of-logic-and-philosophy-3975201

Bertrand Russell. 1912. The Value of Philosophy.p.30 In Chapter 15 of The Problems of Philosophy. Retrieved from Abakare, C. O. and V. C, Okeke. 2016. Philosophy in Contemporary Time: Relevance Vs. Public Perception. Mgbakoigba, Journal of African Studies. Vol.6 No.1.

Bruno Yammeluan Ikuli and Anthony C. Ojimba .2018. Philosophy and Education: The Engines of National Development Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion. Vol.37.

Ochulor, Chinenye. Apebende, Stephen. Metuonu, Iheanacho. 2011.The Necessity Of Metaphysics. American Journal of Social Issues & Humanities Vol.1 No.2.



Ochulor, Chinenye. Apebende, Stephen. Metuonu, Iheanacho. 2011.The Necessity Of Metaphysics. American Journal of Social Issues & Humanities Vol.1 No.2.

## UNIT 4: POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIAL ENGINEERING

### Contents



### Introduction

Welcome to this discussion on the relevance of political philosophy to social reconstruction and development. Before attempting to explain what political philosophy is, it may be appropriate to talk about who political philosophers are. The scholars

referred to as political philosophers are first and foremost, philosophers. It is their examination of political concepts and ideas using philosophical techniques and methods that make them political philosophers. For example, we read of Thomas Hobbes discussing in his famous book titled *Leviathan*, how society could move away from lawlessness to a more organised one through a theory he describes as 'Social Contract'. We see Robert Nozick in his *Anarchy, State and Utopia* postulating a theory of social justice he calls 'The Entitlement Theory of Justice'. We can also see in Julius Nyerere's socialism, what he describes as 'Ujamaa' (brotherhood). There are a lot of other philosophers like Plato, Aristotle Aquinas and many more whose writings cut across different branches of philosophy including political philosophy. One of the central concerns of political philosophers relates to what constitutes a good government and a well-ordered society where humans can actualise their potentials. It is therefore the responsibility of political philosophy and of political philosophers to present worthy political arguments that would enhance and promote values that are desirable for individuals to realise their full potentials as members of political communities.[86]

## 2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

By the end of this unit, you would be able to;

- Define political philosophy
- Express the views of some political philosophers on how society can develop
- Explain the meaning of some political concepts
- Explain the relevance of some political concepts to the development of society

## 3.0 Main Content

### 3.1 Meaning of Political Philosophy

Politics generally is a social activity through which human beings attempt to improve their lives and create a good society for themselves. According to Arendt, politics is often portrayed as a process of conflict resolution, in which rival views or competing interests are reconciled with one another. The inescapable presence of diversity of people and scarcity of resources ensures that politics is an inevitable feature of the human condition. Arendt believes that any attempt to clarify the meaning of politics must surely address two major problems. First is the diverse meanings that the word has when used in everyday language and the second is the automatic assumption that students and teachers of politics must in some way be biased, creating the impression that the subject cannot be approached in an impartial and dispassionate manner. To make matters worse, politics is

[86] Michael Freeden. 2004. Ideology, Political Theory and Political Philosophy. in Gerald F.Gaus & Chandran Kukathas. Eds. Handbook of Political Theory. London: SAGE Publications.p.4

usually thought of as a 'dirty' word which conjures up images of trouble, disruption and even violence on the one hand, and deceit, manipulation and lies on the other.[87]

However, politics has been understood by some as concerning how to distribute scarce amount of resources among people in the society in a just manner. It has to do with the way in which people obtain, keep, and exercise power. Political philosophy, then, is the study of the theories behind politics. These theories may be used to gain power or to justify its existence.[88] As already noted, one may characterise as political all those practices and institutions that are concerned with governance and conflict resolution but political philosophy is a branch of philosophy that is concerned with the concepts and arguments involved in political opinion. The main concern of political philosophy is how to deploy or limit public power so as to maintain human survival and enhance the quality of human life. Other values of political philosophy can be extrapolated especially from the views of political philosophers and from the study of some political concepts. Let us begin with the views of some political philosophers.

1. **Thomas Hobbes**

   Thomas Hobbes' political views are expressed in a number of his works among which is the 'Leviathan'. Hobbes believes that prior to the emergence of a society, was the state of nature in which there was "no knowledge of the face of the earth, no account of time, no arts, no letters" and in which humans lived in "continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."[89] In the chaos of the state of nature which could be described as a state of war considering the constant struggle for survival, no man could sufficiently protect himself against his enemy. Consequently, the people decided to come together to form a society through a covenant or social contract in order to secure their lives and property. For the covenant to be meaningful or significant, it must be secured in the custody of a powerful individual who is capable of punishing offenders, coercing anyone to respond to justice or bringing everyone under subjection. According to Hobbes, "the greatest of humane powers, is that which is compounded of the powers of most men, united by consent, in one person, natural, or civil, that has the use of all their powers depending on his will; such as is the power of a Common-wealth who is the great Leviathan, or the mortal god to which they owe their peace and defense. This Leviathan or state is second only to the immortal God."[90] The value of political philosophy as seen here is that it could through the initiation of social contract brings harmony to a hitherto chaotic society.

2. **John Locke**

[87] Hannah Arendt. 1958. The Human Condition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. p.19
[88] https://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Introduction_to_Philosophy/What_is_Political_Philosophy
[89] Hobbes, T. 2002. *Leviathan*, Edward White ed. Canada: Green Dragon. p.59
[90] Hobbes, T. 2002. *Leviathan*, Edward White ed. Canada: Green Dragon. p.42

In his *Two Treatises of Government*, John Locke proposes a state of nature theory that directly complements his conception of how political development occurs through the formulation of contract. Locke is known to have rebutted Sir Robert Filmer's political theory that celebrates male dominance in favour of equal opportunity and self-determination. Instead, Locke would accept Aristotle's dictum that man seeks to be happy in a state of social harmony as a social animal. Locke believes the minds of humans came into this world as tabula rasa (clean slate), without troubles or chaos and therefore rejects Hobbes proposition of an absolute ruler as unnecessary, as humans are endued with reason based on natural law for the attainment of peace and survival of all humans.[91] The state of nature for Locke was not as chaotic as Hobbes painted it. It was a relatively peaceful state of affairs in which people owned properties. Locke explained that in the state of nature, people were allowed to mix their labour with nature. Anyone therefore that mixes his labour with nature by farming on a piece of land automatically claims ownership of both the land and its produce. However, some lazy miscreants were found to go about stealing other peoples' properties and when caught were severely punished by the property owners. This accounts for the crisis in the state of nature. It was in a bid to address this challenge that the people decided to form a civil society and institute a government whose responsibility would be to protect the lives and properties of citizens and to punish offenders where there are breaches. The role of the state here is a minimalist one or like that of a night watchman, and it is to protect the lives and properties of citizens and to punish law breakers.

**3. John Rawls**

In his *A Theory of Justice*, John Rawls attempts to develop a notion of social justice that deals with conflicts resulting from inequality in the society. His main concern was with the basic structures of society, by which he means the political, social, economic, legal and other institutions of society. Rawls insisted that these institutions favoured certain starting places in the distribution of the benefits and burdens of social cooperation. His aim then was to design principles of justice to which these basic structures of society must conform. This is where he made use of the social contract. His own idea of a state of nature is the original position where people would gather to formulate principles of justice under a veil of ignorance. The idea of a veil of ignorance is to prevent the contractors from having any information into what privileges or position they would occupy in the society that would emerge. This way, the contractors would ensure that they are fair when enunciating principles that would apply to all sectors of society. The two main principles proposed by Rawls are: (1) that each person should have equal rights to the most extensive basic liberties, compatible with a similar system of liberty for all and (2) that social and economic inequalities are to be distributed

[91] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_philosophy

in such a way that they are both to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, consistent with the just saving principle and under the condition of fairness and equal opportunity.[92] Rawls insisted that with the above principles, the problem of inequality in society which is at the root of the problem of justice would be addressed. What this means is that in Rawls' kind of society, even the worse-off in the society are able to enjoy the minimum standard of living.

**4. Robert Nozick**

In his *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, Nozick argues for what he calls the 'Entitlement Conception of Justice' in terms of three principles of just holdings. First, he says that anyone who justly acquires anything or property that is originally un-owned is rightly entitled to keep and use it. Second is that anyone who acquires anything by means of a just transfer of property from someone who originally justly owned it, is rightly entitled to keep and use it. It is only through some combination of these two approaches that anyone is rightly entitled to anything. However, he noted that some people acquire holdings unjustly by theft, fraud or force. This means that there are illegitimate possessions of things. Therefore, the third is that, justice can require the rectification of unjust past acquisitions. These three principles of just holdings or possession of things which are; (a) The principle of acquisition of holdings or justice in acquisition; (b) The principle of transfer of holdings or justice in transfer and (c) The principle of rectification of the violations of the first two principles, all constitute the core of Nozick's libertarian entitlement theory of justice. The conclusion of it is that people should be entitled to use their own properties as they seem fit, so long as such properties have been justly acquired through either principle (a) or (b) above.

**5. Julius Nyerere**

Julius Nyerere, a political philosopher and post-independence African leader proposes a form of socialism he called 'Ujamaa'. Ujamaa is a Swahili term for familyhood and brotherhood. Nyerere's emphasis on brotherhood or familyhood is a situation where people view each other as brothers and sisters or as members of one family. He argues that social institutions and organisations cannot by themselves achieve the purpose of socialism. These institutions can only do so if they are infused with the spirit of brotherhood and care for one another. Nyerere believes that Ujamaa is different from other forms of socialism in that the foundation of Ujamaa philosophy was to be found in African culture and traditions. Some of the elements of Ujamaa are; (i) Love: where an African does not regard his brethren as another enemy. An African regards all men as his brethren, as members of his extended family because people in African societies cared for one another. (ii) Classless society: In Africa, classes were only brought

[92] Rawls, John. 1972. A Theory of Justice. Revised Edition. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. p.215.

as a result of the agrarian and industrial revolution. These events produced conditions that brought about a class system. Since these revolutions did not occur in traditional Africa, therefore no classes existed in Africa. (iii) Work: Nyerere believes that in traditional Africa everyone was a worker. Everyone contributed his or her fair share of efforts towards the production of societal wealth. Therefore, there was no place for laxity or laziness. (iv) Shared resources: Nyerere maintained that wealth was shared in traditional Africa and that no one could hide wealth or amass it for personal selfish reasons. The riches or the poverty of an individual or family was the wealth or poverty of the whole community at large.[93]

Apart from the ideas of political philosophers discussed above, there are also political concepts and ideas which have been instrumental to societal development and transformation. Among such political concepts are the following:

1. **Democracy**

   Democracy is a term that comes from Greek and it is made up of two other words *demos* meaning people and *kratein* meaning to govern or to rule. Democracy is denoted basically, as government in which the supreme power is vested in the people. In the memorable phrase of Abraham Lincoln, democracy is 'government of the people, by the people, and for the people'. This could be interpreted to mean that government comes from the people, it is exercised by the people, and for the purpose of the people's own interests. In some forms, democracy can be exercised directly by the people as in ancient Greece, or through their elected agents as in contemporary large societies. Bentham noted that democracy can be understood as an ideology, a concept or a theory and that it is an ideology in so far as it embodies a set of political ideas that detail the best possible form of social organisation.[94] Democracy is also a mode of decision-making about collectively binding rules and policies over which the people exercise control. In the wise, the most democratic arrangement is that where all members collectively enjoy effective equal rights to take part in decision-making.[95] In a truly democratic government, individuals have guaranteed civil and political rights and can freely express their views without fear of being arrested, tortured or discriminated against. Indeed, one of the prime functions of democracy is to protect basic human rights such as freedom of speech and religion, the right to equal protection under law and the opportunity to organise and participate fully in the political, economic and cultural life of society.

---

[93] 'African Socialism: Analysis of Ujamaa.' All Answers Ltd. ukessays.com, November 2018. Web. 1 October 2019. <https://www.ukessays.com/essays/politics/african-socialism-analysis-ujamaa-6496.php?vref=1>

[94] Adel M. Abdellatif. 2003. Good Governance and Its Relationship to Democracy and Economic Development. Global Forum III on Fighting Corruption and Safeguarding Integrity
Seoul May 20-31. GF3/WS/IV-3/S1. P.6.

[95] Beetham, David 'Liberal Democracy and the Limits of Democratization' , Political Studies special issue, vol.40. 1992, p.40

The United Nations recognises these rights as the foundation of justice and peace in the world.[96]

## 2. Human Rights

Human Rights are rights that are basic to all human beings, whatever their nationality, place of origin, gender, colour, religion, language, or any other status. Humans are believed to be equally entitled to certain rights without discrimination. These rights are all interrelated, interdependent and indivisible. They were declared as an aftermath of the horrors of the Second World War. The international community recognized in the Universal Declaration, that the inherent dignity and equal rights of all people need to be protected. It was then that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 was formally recognised in international law. The Declaration concerns a set of inalienable human rights, including the basic right to life, to safety from unfair persecution, to the freedom of thought, expression and religion, and to more culturally based rights pertaining to marriage, employment, education and shelter. In the Nigerian constitution, these rights are summarised as:

**i.** Right to life

**ii.** Right to dignity of human person

**iii.** Right to personal liberty

**iv.** Right to fair hearing

**v.** Right to private and family life

**vi.** Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion

**vii.** Right to freedom of expression and the press

**viii.** Right to peaceful assembly and association

**ix.** Right to freedom of movement

**x.** Right to freedom from discrimination

**xi.** Right to acquire and own immovable property anywhere in Nigeria[97]

---

[96] Democracy in Brief. Bureau of International Information Program. US Department of State. p.3. http://usinfor.state.gov.

[97] Constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria,1999.

3. **Justice**

Justice is one of the most important moral and political concepts. It forms the basic concern of political philosophers such as Plato, John Locke, John Rawls, Robert Nozick and David Gauthier.. The word 'justice' comes from the Latin *Jus*, meaning right or law. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the 'just' person as one who typically 'does what is morally right' and is disposed to 'giving everyone his or her due'.[98] Cohen is of the view that justice is usually said to exist when a person receives that to which he or she is entitled, namely, exactly those benefits and burdens that are due the individual because of his or her particular characteristics and circumstances. He went on to explain that if someone states that a certain person or act is good, moral, or virtuous, he or she does not necessarily mean that that person or act is just. As an example, he stated that Mary might believe that Tom's lending her his coat when she was cold was good or generous, but it was an act of beneficence, not of justice. Similarly, if someone states that a certain person or act is immoral or wrong, he or she does not necessarily mean that it is unjust. In the same way, he said, Tom may be deliberately rude to his employees, and he may show callous disregard for the suffering of a poor man whom he could easily help, but although he acts immorally in both instances, he may perhaps ease his conscience by reminding himself that at least he did not act unjustly. The point made here by Cohen is simply that justice is not the whole of morality; it is only one part of it and is, therefore, one characteristic among many of a good society.[99] It should be noted however that all of these views on justice have been contested by philosophers, thereby making the term 'justice' an essentially contested one.

4. **Rule of Law**

The idea of the rule of law is to the effect that the laws of the land take supremacy over all other considerations in the state. The laws comprise those fundamental principles and procedures that guarantee the freedom of each individual and which allows participation in political life. The power of the state is directly linked to the rule of law and is for this reason, able to guarantees the right to free flourishing of individual persons. In a democratic setting as mentioned earlier, equality of persons is very important and this is well expressed in the equality of all the citizens as well as the leaders before the law. The leaders can only perform certain actions when it has been vested with such powers by law or by the Constitution. Following from this, the rule of law holds the state accountable for its acts in the interest of the citizens and it also gives the citizens the opportunity to form their opinions on matters. When there is the rule of law, citizens are completely allowed to take part in political life either directly or indirectly.[100] In talking about the rule

[98] https://www.iep.utm.edu/

[99] Cohen, R. L. ed. 1986. Justice. New York. Springer Science and Business Media.p. 11.

[100] Paula Becker and Jean-Aimé A. Raveloson. 2008. What Is Democracy? KMF-CNOE & NOVA STELLA. P.9

of law in a democracy, it is important to make reference to the separation of powers that exist among the various arms of government, that is, the legislative arm which is vested with making laws, the judicial arm that interprets the law and the executive arm that implements the law. These laws are often processed into a written document outlining the basic principles by which a country or organisation should be governed. This document is called a constitution.

## 4.0 Conclusion

One of the central concerns of political philosophers relates to what constitutes a good government and a well-ordered society where humans can actualise their potentials. It is therefore the responsibility of political philosophy and of political philosophers to study the theories behind politics and then come up with worthy political arguments that would enhance and promote values that are desirable for individuals to realise their full potentials as members of political communities. It is in this process that political philosophy can be said to contribute to social engineering, reconstruction and development.

## 5.0 Summary

We have been able to explain the extent to which political philosophy can be said to contribute to social engineering, reconstruction and development in society. This we did by examining the views of some political philosophers on how best society should be run. We also examined some political concepts and ideas which have been instrumental to societal development and transformation such as democracy, human rights, justice and rule of law. Democracy is a mode of decision-making about collectively binding rules and policies over which the people exercise control. But for democracy to thrive, humans in a democracy are entitled to certain rights without discrimination. For this reason, justice becomes important as every infraction on these rights would amount to injustice, and acts of injustice pose an impediment to societal development. However, all of these efforts at development will remain a *will-o'-the-wisp* if the rule of law which comprises some fundamental principles and procedures that guarantee the freedom of each individual and which allows participation in political life, is not respected.

## 6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

- What is political philosophy?
- Briefly explain the views of the following philosophers on the emergence of the society and government:
  i. Thomas Hobbes
  ii. John Locke

- Briefly explain John Rawls and Robert Nozick's idea of justice
- Explain the meaning of 'Ujamaa'
- Write short notes on the following political concepts:
  i. Democracy

ii. Rule of law
iii. Justice

## 7.0 References/Further Readings


Adel M. Abdellatif. 2003. Good Governance and Its Relationship to Democracy and Economic Development. Global Forum III on Fighting Corruption and Safeguarding Integrity Seoul May 20-31. GF3/WS/IV-3/S1.

Beetham, David.1992. 'Liberal Democracy and the Limits of Democratization', Political Studies special issue, vol.40.

Cohen, R. L. ed. 1986. *Justice*. New York. Springer Science and Business Media.

Constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria, 1999.

Democracy in Brief. Bureau of International Information Program. US Department of State. http://usinfor.state.gov.

Hannah Arendt. 1958. *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hobbes, T. 2002. *Leviathan*, Edward White ed. Canada: Green Dragon.

Michael Freeden. 2004. Ideology, Political Theory and Political Philosophy. in Gerald F.Gaus & Chandran Kukathas. Eds. *Handbook of Political Theory*. London: SAGE Publications.

Paula Becker and Jean-Aimé A. Raveloson. 2008. *What Is Democracy*? KMF- CNOE & NOVA STELLA.

Rawls, John. 1972. *A Theory of Justice.* Revised Edition. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

## Module 3: Philosophy and Other Disciplines

Unit 1: Philosophy as a second-order activity
Unit 2: Philosophy and religion
Unit 3: Philosophy and science
Unit 4: Philosophy and the social sciences

### UNIT 1: PHILOSOPHY AS A SECOND-ORDER ACTIVITY

**Contents**



### 1.0: Introduction

Welcome to this unit where we will looking at philosophy as a second-order activity. The topic itself suggests that there are two parts to our discussion in this unit. First we will talk about the idea of a second-order discipline and second, we will examine the relationship of philosophy to other fields of study with a view to establishing the extent to which philosophy can properly be regarded a second-order activity.

### 2.0: Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

At the end of this unit, the student should be able to:

- understand what a second-order activity is;

- explain the sense in which philosophy is a second-order activity; and
- explain philosophy relates with other disciplines in its position as a second-order activity.

## 3.0: Main Content

### 3.1: The Idea of a Second-Order Activity

A first-order activity is an effort within the domain of a specific discipline to understand and posit on issues, or to find reasons or explanations for events that it observes. For example, science's explanation of the occurrence of rainfall by reference to scientific paradigm can be seen as a first-order intellectual activity. A second-order inquiry, on the other hand, will examine the explanations given at the first order level, with the purpose or aim of ascertaining whether the explanation stands up to reason, and to what extent. Apart from this, definitions and other clarifications of a general, universal nature properly belong to the second order. If, for example, there is a discussion on whether a certain conduct or judgment was just or fair, the different positions on it belong to the first order; while the effort to understand what justice is, and what it means for an action to be considered just or fair, belong to the second order. The domain of the second order, strictly-speaking, is that of philosophy.

### 3.2: Philosophy and other Disciplines

The basis of philosophy's relationship with other disciplines is its status as a second-order activity whose main concern is to examine the first-order claims, assumptions and theoretical underpinnings of other disciplines. In discussing what he described as the two streams of analytic philosophy, John Searle points out that, even though they disagree on some important points, they both accept the fact that philosophy is a second-order discipline. According to him,

> Both streams, however, accepted the central view that the aim of philosophy was conceptual analysis, and that in consequence philosophy was fundamentally different from any other discipline. …it was a second-order discipline analysing the logical structure of language in general, but not dealing with first-order truths about the world. Philosophy was universal in subject matter precisely because it had no special subject matter other than the discourse of all other disciplines….[101]

Kwame Gyekye attested to the second-order nature of philosophy when he described philosophy as,

> …essentially a critical and systematic inquiry into the fundamental ideas or principles underlying human thought, conduct, and experience. Ideas, which include the beliefs and

[101] Searle, J. 2003, "Contemporary Philosophy in the United States." Bunnin, N. and Tsui-James, E. P. (eds.) *The Blackwell Companion to Philosophy*, 2nd Edition, Malden: Blackwell Publishing. 5

> presuppositions that we hold and cherish, relate to the various aspects of human experience: to the origins of the world, the existence of God, the nature of the good society, the basis for political authority, and so on.[102]

These 'ideas, beliefs and presuppositions belong to the first order, while the 'critical and systematic inquiry' into them constitutes the second order, which is the domain of philosophy. Using the example of the human society, Gyekye points out that the social arrangements and institutions are based on certain ideas and assumptions, and these are the ideas "that can critically be – and in fact is – examined by philosophy."[103]

Isaac Ukpokolo corroborated this second-order status of philosophy when he described philosophy as a discipline that employs:

> the principles and method of logical analysis to interrogate existing beliefs, claims, assumptions, ideas, positions and dispositions, resulting in a clearer and better understanding of reality whether social, political, cultural, spiritual or moral…[104]

The foregoing implies that philosophy is interested in seeking and obtaining a thorough understanding of notions, ideas and assumptions that both underlie and result from human thoughts, decisions and activities in other areas of knowledge.[105]

John Olubi Sodipo made the same point about philosophy when he describes philosophy as,

> reflective and critical thinking about the concepts and principles we use to organise our experience in morals, in religion, in social and political life, in law, in psychology, in history and in the natural sciences...[106]

Gene Blocker explains the second-order status of philosophy more explicitly when he said:

> Philosophy can be understood as a "second order" reflection on other "first order" disciplines; so, for example, corresponding to "first order" investigations of history or art or law by historians, art critics, or legal experts, there are branches of philosophy knows as philosophy of history, philosophy of art, and philosophy of law – not investigating history or art or law per se, but reflecting on the ways in

---

[102] Gyekye, K. 1997. *Tradition and modernity: philosophical reflections on the African experience*, New York: Oxford University Press. 5.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Ukpokolo, I. E. 2015. *Methodology of research and writing in philosophy*, Ibadan: Kairos Publishing. 30.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Sodipo, J. O. 2004. *Philosophy and the African prospect (selected and edited by Fadahunsi, A and Oladipo, O.),* Ibadan: Hope Publications. 16-17.

> which the specialists talk and write about history, art, and law.[107]

Michael H. McCarthy explains further, the necessity of a philosophical examination of human activities in other disciplines, especially in science when he said,

> The factual sciences consist of first-order truths discovered and verified through accepted forms of empirical method. The second-order truths of logic abstract from all specific propositional content to assert the formal conditions every scientific truth must satisfy. Pure logic also constructs alternative sets of formal deductive system that can be appropriated by the positive sciences for the systematic expression of their results. …logic articulates the essential conditions of scientific theory…it assists science by providing skeletal theory structures, for which the first-order sciences can supply the substantive content.[108]

Corroborating philosophy's role in the sciences, Alex Rosenberg points out that the discipline of philosophy attempts to address two sorts of questions:

(1) The questions that the sciences – physical, biological, social, and behavioural – cannot answer; and
(2) Questions about why the sciences cannot answer the former questions.[109]

Philosophy as an intellectual activity, not only interrogates other disciplines or fields in order to critically assess their claims and underlying logic, but also forges the necessary link between the different fields of intellectual activity as well as between theory and action.

In his book, *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution*, C. P. Snow observes with obvious dissatisfaction the gap between the sciences and the humanities, each ensconced in its own little world, and suspicious of the other while the society languishes at the absence of the fruit of the cooperation between the two.[110] Sodipo, however, sees in philosophy the chance to bridge the gap. In his words:

> Now, because philosophy cannot but be interested in the human condition, its hopes and fears, its laws of thought, its norms of conduct, its criteria of artistic creation and judgment, while at the same time 'observing' that adventure of the human mind called Science, it is in a position to make a substantial contribution towards bridging this gap. It is easy

[107] Blocker, G. "Philosophy of science: an introduction." 1.
[108] McCarthy, M. H. 1990. *The crisis of philosophy*, Albany: State University of New York Press. 80.
[109] Rosenberg, A. 2005. *Philosophy of science: a contemporary introduction* (second edition), New York: Routledge. 1.
[110] Snow, C. P. 1959. *The two cultures and the scientific revolution,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

> for the scholar in the Humanities to say that a man who is ignorant of history, of the arts, of the role of religion and language in society, of the values transmitted in literature, oral and written, hardly justifies being called cultured or civilised. Yet the philosopher sees that it is becoming more and more essential for the humanist to realise that the exploration of the natural order called science has important human value and significance, and that the scientific edifice of the natural world is, in its intellectual depth, complexity and articulation one of the most beautiful and wonderful works of the mind of man.[111]

**4.0: Conclusion**

Having looked at philosophy's relationship with other disciplines in this unit, we can say that the basis for this relationship is philosophy's status as a second-order intellectual activity. This is because philosophy is, as pointed out in this unit, the critique of the ideas, assumptions, theories and suppositions that underlie human judgments, decisions and actions in other areas of knowledge.

**5.0: Summary**

In this unit, we have examined the idea of a second-order discipline. We also examined the relationship of philosophy to other fields of study with a view to establishing the extent to which philosophy can properly be regarded a second-order activity. Following from the views of various scholars, we posited that philosophy is not only an intellectual activity that interrogates other disciplines or fields for the purpose of critically assessing their claims and underlying logic, philosophy also mends fences and forges the necessary link between the different fields of intellectual activity.

**6.0: Self-Assessment Exercise**

- What does it mean for a discipline to be regarded as a second-order intellectual activity?
- In what sense is philosophy a second-order activity;
- What would you consider to be the reason for philosophy's interest in other disciplines

**7.0: References/Further Reading**

Bello, A. G. A. 2004. "Some methodological controversies in African philosophy." K. Wiredu, (ed.). *A Companion to African Philosophy.* Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 263-273.

Gyekye, K. 1997. *Tradition and modernity: philosophical reflections on the African experience*, New York: Oxford University Press.

[111] Sodipo, 23.

Habermas, J. 1971. *Knowledge and human interest (trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro)*, Boston: Beacon Press.
McCarthy, M. H. 1990. *The crisis of philosophy*, Albany: State University of New York Press.
Rosen, S. "Introduction." Rosen, S. (ed.) *The philosopher's handbook: essential readings from Plato to Kant*, New York: Random House.
Rosenberg, A. 2005. *Philosophy of science: a contemporary introduction* (second edition), New York: Routledge.
Searle, J. R. 2003. "Contemporary Philosophy in the United States." Bunnin, Nicholas and Tsui-James, E. P. (eds.) *The Blackwell Companion to Philosophy*, 2nd Edition, Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
Snow, C. P. 1959. *The two cultures and the scientific revolution*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Sodipo, J. O. 2004. *Philosophy and the African prospect (selected and edited by Fadahunsi, A and Oladipo, O.)*, Ibadan: Hope Publications.
Ukpokolo, I. E. 2015. *Methodology of research and writing in philosophy*, Ibadan: Kairos Publishing.

## UNIT 2: PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

**Contents**



### 1.0: Introduction

Welcome to this unit on philosophy and religion. Our focus here will be on philosophy's relationship with religion in order to ascertain the soundness of the assumptions and claims made in the area of religion. To achieve this, we shall discuss this topic under 4 (four) sub-headings: (i) The idea of religion (ii) Philosophy of religion (iii) The idea of God and (iv) The human search for God. It is truism that religion plays a central role in human affairs, more than most other factors. Religion influences several issues, including dispositions, relationships, worldviews, and many more. If, as already noted in the last

unit, philosophy's core concern is to interrogate assumptions and ideas that we live by, then, it is important that philosophy give a lot of attention to such an influential factor as religion.

**2.0: Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)**

It is hoped that, at the end of this unit, the student will

- understand what religion is;
- have a clear understanding of the relationship between philosophy and religion;
- have an appreciation of some of the issues in the philosophy of religion.

**3.0: Main Content**

**3.1: The Idea of Religion**

Even though religion is believed to be as old as humanity itself, the systematic study of religion is held by many scholars to be fairly recent,[112] and the philosophy of religion even more so.[113] Etymologically, the term 'religion' comes from the Latin word '*religio*' which in turn derives from the phrase '*re-ligare'* or '*re-legere'*. *Religare* means 'to bind back' (meaning, to re-establish by worship, a lost or broken intimacy between God and worshippers[114]), while *relegere* means 'to make a law again'. St Thomas Aquinas points out the connection between the two terms when he says, "'"*lex*" [law] is derived from "*ligare*" [to bind]."[115] Discussing the etymology of 'religion', A. C. Bouquet, writes:

> of Roman writers, Cicero held that it came from a root '*leg*-' – meaning 'to take up, gather, count, or observe', i.e. 'to observe the signs of Divine communication'. Servitus, on the other hand, held that it came from another root, '*lig*-' – 'to bind', so that 'religio' meant 'a relationship', i.e. 'a communion between the human and Super-Human'.[116]

Based on this, Bouquet sees religion as "a fixed relationship between the human self and some non-human entity, the Sacred, the Supernatural, the Self-Existent, the Absolute, or simply 'God'."[117]

For St Augustine, *religio* meant worship, those patterns of action by which, in public, we self-consciously turn ourselves towards God in homage and praise. There could, he

[112] See, for example, Griffiths, P. J. 2000. "The very idea of religion." *First things. No. 103, May 2000.* 30.

[113] See Jordan, M. D. Honderich 802.

[114] Griffiths, P. J. 2000. "The very idea of religion." *First things. No. 103, May 2000.* 31

[115] Aquinas, St. T. 1947. *Summa theologiae.* Trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province. New York: Benzinger Brothers. Q. 90, Art. 1. 1329.

[116] Quoted in Idowu, ibid. 23.

[117] Ibid.

thought, be a right and proper ("true") way of worshipping God, just as there could be improper and damnable ("false") ways of doing so.[118]

For Olusegun Oladipo, religion is an expression of a relationship between individuals and God. He goes on to say that,

> It is both a belief and an attitude. It is the belief that God (or whatever is regarded as the ultimate reality in each culture) created (or made) the world and everything in it, and that it is on Him that we are dependent for our being and sustenance. As an attitude, it is devotional; it expresses our sense of dependence on God.[119]

H. G. Wells would seem to have a definition or explanation that covers the motive, manner and essence of religion. According to him,

> Nearly all of us want something to hold us together, something to dominate this swarming confusion and save us from the black misery of wounded and exploded pride, of thwarted desire, of futile conclusions. We want more oneness, some steadying thing that will afford an escape from fluctuations. It seems to me that this desire to get the complex of life simplified is essentially what has been called the religious motive, and the manner in which a man achieves that simplification, if he does achieve it, and imposes an order upon his life, is his religion.[120]

For Kwasi Wiredu,

> Religion as such is, in essence, simply a metaphysic joined to a particular type of attitude. A religion, on the other hand, is, typically, all this plus an ethic, a system of ritual, and an officialdom (usually hierarchical) for exhorting, reinforcing or monitoring conformity to them. In the first sense, religion can be purely personal – one can be religious without having a religion; which, actually, is not at all uncommon. In the second, religion is both personal and institutional.[121]

Wiredu believes that to be religious is to entertain certain ontological and/or cosmological beliefs about the nature of the world and about human destiny and to have an attitude of trust, dependency, or unconditional reverence toward that which is taken to

---

[118] Griffiths, ibid. 31.

[119] Oladipo, O. 2004. "Religion in African culture: some conceptual issues." Wiredu, K. (ed.). *A companion to African philosophy*, Malden: Blackwell. 356.

[120] Quoted in Idowu, E. B. 1973. *African traditional religion: a definition*, London: SCM Press Ltd. 2.

[121] Wiredu, K. 2010. "African religions from a philosophical point of view." Taliaferro, C., Draper, P. and Quinn, P. L. (eds.). *A companion to philosophy of religion (second edition)*, Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 34.

be the determiner of that destiny, whether it be an intelligent being or an aspect of reality.[122]

**3.2: Philosophy of religion**

Though philosophy of religion as a distinct discipline is relatively new, its central topics—the existence and nature of the divine, humankind's relation to it, the nature of religion, and the place of religion in human life—have been with us since the inception of philosophy. Philosophy of religion comprises of philosophical analyses of certain concepts or tenets central to religions.[123] According to Mark D. Jordan,

> These concepts or tenets typically include the rationality of belief in God, the demonstrability of God's existence, the logical character of religious language, and apparent contradictions between divine attributes and features of the world—say, between omnipotence and evil, miraculous interventions and natural law, omniscience and free will.[124]

Philosophers have long critically examined the truth of and rational justification for religious claims, and have explored such philosophically interesting phenomena as faith, religious experience, and the distinctive features of religious discourse.

William J. Wainwright points out the dual focus of the philosophical reflection on religion:

> Historically, philosophical reflection on religious themes had two foci: first, God or Brahman or Nirvana or whatever else the *object* of religious thought, attitudes, feelings, and practice was believed to be, and, second, the human religious *subject*, that is, the thoughts, attitudes, feelings, and practices themselves.[125]

There is also a sub-disciplinary area in philosophy known as epistemology of religion. The focus here is to attempt to solve philosophical problems about knowledge which arise from religion. For example: Is there mystical knowledge? Is there knowledge by revelation or natural theology? Can God be known to exist, or is there a sound proof of God's existence? Is it possible to have knowledge of the properties of God: omnipotence,

---

[122] Wiredu, ibid. 35.

[123] Jordan, M. D. 2005. "Religion, history of the philosophy of" Honderich, T. (ed.) *The Oxford companion to philosophy (Second edition),* Oxford: Oxford University Press. 802.

[124] Ibid.

[125] Wainwright, W. J. "Introduction." Wainwright, W. J. (ed.) *The Oxford handbook of philosophy of religion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. 3.

omniscience, benevolence, simplicity, and eternity?[126] These and many more form the disciplinary focus of epistemology of religion

### 3.3: The Idea of God

God – or, broadly speaking, the supernatural – is a central theme in religion. With very few exceptions,[127] those who practise religion or hold some form of religious faith believe in the existence of God – a supernatural being who has power over the world. The question of God's existence is a weighty one. As Robert Paul Wolff observes,

> To say that there is a God is to say there is a hope of immortality, a threat of punishment beyond the grave, a significance to the existence and nature of the universe, an authority above kings, above emperors, above one's own self.[128]

However, since philosophy is basically about being critical about claims and assumptions that people live by, the need to demonstrate by reason what is accepted by faith cannot be set aside. It is in this regard that certain arguments or 'proofs' of the existence of God have come up, some of which will be discussed in this section. Aristotle, for example, identified philosophy with metaphysics or theology (which is the study of – or discourse about – God), and, traditionally, philosophy has been deployed by religion, not as a critical examination of the claims of religion, but as a tool for rationally justifying religious beliefs.[129] It is in this regard, at least in part, that we understand the arguments for the existence of God.

The Ontological Arguments are varied, but the most popular of them was put forward by a medieval philosopher and bishop, St Anselm. According to him in his *Proslogium* (c. 1080), God is that than which nothing greater can be thought.[130] In other words, the greatest being or entity that the human mind can imagine or conceive is God. Anselm quotes the scripture that says it is only the fool who says there is no God. A monk called Gaunilo wrote a rejoinder titled, "In Defence of the Fool" in which he argued that it is not

---

[126] Priest, S. 2005. "Religion and epistemology" Honderich, T. (ed.) *The Oxford companion to philosophy (Second edition),* Oxford: Oxford University Press. 810.

[127] For instance, Jonardan Ganeri points out that some Hindus do not believe in the existence of God. See Ganeri, J. "Hinduism." Taliaferro, C., Draper, P. and Quinn, P. L. (eds.). *A companion to philosophy of religion (second edition)*, Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 5.

[128] Wolff, R. P. 2002. "St Anselm and St Aquinas: proofs for the existence of God." *Ten great works of philosophy*, New York: New American Library. 104.

[129] Sodipo, ibid. 35.

[130] Anselm, St. "Proslogium" in Wolff, R. P. 2002. *Ten great works of philosophy*, New York: New American Library. 106.

unreasonable to imagine that there is no God, since it is not impossible to imagine, for example, a golden mountain or a flying horse that actually does not exist. Thus, for him, to imagine something does not automatically translate to what is imagined having an existence independent of the mind of the thinker. In response to this, Anselm pointed out that to actually exist is greater than to merely exist in the mind, which implies that what is only imagined cannot be that than which nothing greater can be imagined. Scholars such as Robert Wolff believe that it is in Anselm "that we find what is probably the most remarkable piece of philosophical reasoning in the entire history of western thought – the famous Ontological Argument for the existence of God."[131]
The Cosmological Arguments were made popular by another medieval philosopher and churchman, St Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas puts forward the five arguments for the existence of God, popularly known as the Five Ways.[132] The first of these is the argument from motion. According to Aquinas, everything moves, and every motion is caused by another; every moving thing is moved by another, which in turn is moved by another. "For motion is nothing else than the reduction of something from potentiality to actuality," says Aquinas. "But nothing can be reduced from potentiality to actuality, except by something in a state of actuality."[133] Motion, however, cannot go back to infinity because, as Aquinas points out, "then there would be no first mover, and, consequently, no other mover; seeing that subsequent movers move only inasmuch as they are put in motion by the first mover."[134] And this First Mover or Unmoved Mover, according to Aquinas, is what everyone understands as God.

The second is the argument from causality, and it follows about the same trajectory as the first. We observe that everything is caused by another, which in turn is caused by yet another. According to Aquinas, "There is no case known (neither is it, indeed, possible) in which a thing is found to be the efficient cause of itself; for so it would be prior to itself, which is impossible."[135] In efficient causes, it is impossible to go back to infinity, and to take away the cause is to take away the effect. The First Cause – the Uncaused Cause which is the first and source of all efficient causes – is what everyone understands as God.

The third is the argument from necessity and contingency. In the universe, things come into being and pass out of being. But, says Aquinas, it is impossible for these always to exist, for that which is possible not to be at some time is not. Therefore, if everything is possible not to be, then at one time there could have been nothing in existence. Now if this were true, even now there would be nothing in existence, because that which does not exist only begins to exist by something already existing. But there has to be a being

[131] Wolff, ibid. 105.
[132] This is found in Aquinas, St. T. 1947. *Summa theologiae.* Trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province. New York: Benzinger Brothers. Part I, Q 2, Art. 3. 14-16.
[133] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, ibid. 15.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid.

whose existence is not owed to another being, a being who necessarily exists and is the cause of other things. This Necessary Being is what we call God.

The fourth is the argument from the levels of perfection. According to Aquinas, there are degrees of perfection in things, such that we can speak of one object being better than the other:

> Among beings there are some more and some less good, true, noble and the like. But "more" and "less" are predicated of different things, according as they resemble in their different ways something which is the maximum… so that there is something which is truest, something best, something noblest and, consequently, something which is uttermost being; for those things that are greatest in truth are greatest in being.[136]

There is thus an entity that has the fullness of perfection and every other entity can be measured against this absolute perfection. This entity, according to Aquinas, is God.
The fifth is the argument from purpose, also sometimes called the teleological argument. Aquinas says, "We see that things which lack intelligence, such as natural bodies, act for an end, and this is evident from their acting always, or nearly always, in the same way, so as to obtain the best result."[137] But things which lack intelligence cannot move themselves purposefully unless they are moved by a being which has knowledge and intelligence. "Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God."[138]

What have been commonly called the Moral Arguments have been postulated by some philosophers, most notably Immanuel Kant, a German modern philosopher. According to C. Stephen Evans, "Moral arguments for God's existence are, for lay people, among the most popular reasons for belief in God, though they have often been neglected by philosophers."[139] In the line of the moral arguments, God has to exist in order to fulfil the need for a reward for those who live virtuously. Kant rejected all theoretical attempts to show that God's existence could be known, but held nevertheless that a rational moral agent should believe in God. Since Kant held that happiness is a good that all human beings seek, he believed that the supreme end of the moral life, the complete or highest good, is a world where people are both morally virtuous and happy, and where their happiness is proportional to their virtue. He claimed that one could not reasonably believe that such an end is attainable unless God exists.[140]

---

[136] Ibid. 16.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Evans, C. S. 2010. "Moral arguments." Taliaferro, C., Draper, P. and Quinn, P. L. (eds.) *A companion to philosophy of religion (second edition)*, Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd. 385.
[140] Evans, ibid. 388.

The attributes of God include: Goodness, Perfection, Simplicity, Omniscience, Omnipotence, and Omnipresence. Goodness means that God is good in himself and good towards others, good in his actions as well as in his intentions. Thus we call him omnibenevolent. Perfection is, in a sense, like goodness, except that it is not an exclusively moral attribute. Perfection implies that God possesses the highest of all possible attributes such that God is the measure of whatever perfection other beings have. Simplicity, in contradistinction to being complex, implies that God is not divided into parts as creatures are. Omniscience means that God knows everything – he is all-knowing. Omnipotence means that God is all-powerful or almighty, and omnipresence means that he is everywhere.

Conceptually, some of these attributes imply and include others. For example, being omnipotent – all-able – implies, among other things, that God can be everywhere (omnipresent) or know everything (omniscient). Perfection, too, would imply that God has, among other things, the very fullness of goodness.

On the other hand, the combination of certain attributes raises some problems. For instance, if God is omnibenevolent and omnipotent (in the complete sense that includes omnipresence and omniscience), how do we explain the occurrence of evil in the world? Why do bad things happen to good people? Why do the innocent experience inexplicable disasters? This, in sum, is what is called the Problem of Evil, which, in the consideration of many, is the strongest argument against the existence of a benevolent and omnipotent God. Many explanations and theories have come up to defend theism against this charge, but it is a problem that, for all intents and purposes, has refused to go away.
There are a number of positions concerning the existence of God as well as his relationship with the world. Even though each of them has different strands, the central points will quickly be considered here. The first here is *theism*, which is the position that there is God, and that he has control over the universe. *Deism* (originating from the idea of '*Deus absconditus*') believes in the existence of God who created the world and has since ceased being involved with its affairs. *Polytheism* is the position that there are many gods. *Pantheism* believes in the existence of a God who is manifest in the whole of creation, such that God can be said to live in everything (or, by implication, every object is God). *Agnosticism*, coming from the phrase Greek *'a-gnosis'* (not knowing), is the position that God's existence is either not knowable, or that knowing it is not important. An agnostic, in other words, is one who either claims that God's existence is not knowable, or who does not care whether God exists or not. Atheism is the position that God does not exist. Unlike agnosticism which claims not to know one way or the other, atheism positively posits that God does not exist.

### 3.4: The Human Search for God

Humanity, for many centuries, seems to be involved in a struggle for self-projection, such that much of its efforts with regard to the divine are, in fact, efforts in self-interest. The human heart seems be to constantly concerned with reaching outside itself – or beyond

itself – for something other and greater than its being; and it seems humanity (or every human heart) would not rest until a satisfaction is attained in this direction.[141] For St Augustine, it is an internal search for something superior: *ab exterioribus ad interiora*, *ab inferioribus ad superiora*.[142] But even at that, it is fairly clear in Augustine that the search for God is related to the desire or love in man for beauty and perfection, something which humanity in itself was unable to produce. And so Augustine would write:

> But what do I love, when I love Thee? Not the beauty of bodies, nor the fair harmony of time, nor the brightness of the light, so gladsome to our eyes, nor sweet melodies of varied songs, nor the fragrant smell of flowers, and ointments and spices, not manna and honey, not limbs acceptable to embracements of flesh. None of these I love, when I love my God; and yet I love a kind of light, and melody, and fragrance, and meat, and embracement when I love my God, the light, melody, fragrance, meat, embracement of my inner man: where there shineth unto my soul what space cannot contain and there soundeth what time beareth not away, and there smelleth what breathing disperseth not, and there tasteth what eating diminisheth not, and there clingeth what satiety divorceth not. This is it which I love when I love my God.[143]

Much earlier, Aristotle, in arguing for the existence of God (the Unmoved Mover), would be seeking for a fully actualized being who is the universal object of desire.[144] Until the Enlightenment, the matter seemed fairly settled, especially among theists: God, in broadly Judeo-Christian terms, was the Greater Other.[145] But since then, this could no longer be taken for granted. Science, the human spirit, human independence, and so on, have since become fairly equal contestants with God for this position.

From the Enlightenment onwards, there has been a gradual effort to replace God with the human spirit.[146] As William Desmond said,

> One might say that Western modernity shows a progressive process of stripping the world of the signs of the divine and its ambiguous communication to man. As being becomes

---

[141] St. Augustine gives a voice to this but approaches it from an exclusively religious viewpoint. See St. Augustine. 1909. *The confessions of St. Augustine.* Trans. Edward Bouverie Pusey. New York: P. F. Colier & Son. 1.

[142] Quoted in Desmond, W. 2000. Introduction, Philosophy of religion. *The philosopher's handbook*. 108.

[143] St. Augustine. *Confession.* 1909. 97.

[144] Aristotle, *Metaphysics* (Book 12), quoted in History of the philosophy of religion. *Oxford companion to philosophy*, p. 803.

[145] This, despite the similarities, is to be viewed differently from Karl Barth's conception of God as 'Wholly Other', for Barth seeks primarily to show God as being totally different from creation and having nothing in common with it, rather than being merely greater. The 'Barthian otherness', if we may so describe it, implies "exclusive separation". See Barth, 'Knowledge of God and Service to God', quoted in King, M. L. 1952. Karl Barth's conception of God. 97.

[146] According to Mark D. Jordan, 'many of the propagandists of Enlightenment were trenchant critics of religion.' History of the philosophy of religion. Ed. Ted Honderich. 2005. *Oxford companion to philosophy.* 804.

> more objectified, the less it provides the nurturing matrix for religious reverence. In tandem with this, we find an increasing recourse to our own powers to deal with this world in its qualitative poverty. We understand ourselves as seeking to be masters who can overcome its equivocal thereness.[147]

What informs this projection is the need in man – deep in the recesses of his psyche – for a more perfect, more powerful being; in short, a being that fulfils man's desire for something better and greater than the reality of himself and his limitations, and the imperfect realities around him. In himself and his environment – physical, social, mental and otherwise – he finds imperfection; therefore, he needs a being or a reality that is not subject to the limitations of the realities around him. Thus there is a projection into this Perfect Other or Greater Other - all that man desires but is unable to achieve or realise.

**4.0: Conclusion**

Even though the formal study of religion and the philosophy of religion are fairly recent, religion, the matrix of man's relationship with God or the supernatural, has been around since time immemorial, and so, philosophy of religion to a considerable extent, has been the effort to assess the claims of religion as well as its underlying ideas. And so this unit has taken a look at the phenomenon of religion and philosophy's concern in the study of religion. It also looked at some issues in religion that are of interest to philosophy.

**5.0: Summary**

In this unit, we have among other things, examined the meaning of religion, as the platform of man's relationship with the divine. We also examined the subject-matter of philosophy in religion, which is to interrogate the ideas and claims made in the area of religion. Since the idea of God is a major subject of discourse in religion, we examined the idea of God, as the uncreated, omnipotent Creator of the world. Various ontological, cosmological and moral arguments for the existence of God were explained. We ended with some reflection on the human search for God.

**6.0: Self-Assessment Exercise**

- Attempt a definition of religion;
- What would you consider to be the main concern of philosophy of religion?
- Briefly explain the following Cosmological Arguments for the existence of God:
  Argument from motion
  Argument from causality
  Argument from necessity and contingency
- Briefly explain Immanuel Kant's moral argument for the existence of God.

**7.0: References/Further Reading**

Anselm, St. "Proslogium" in Wolff, R. P. 2002. *Ten great works of philosophy*, New York: New American Library.

[147] Desmond, W. Introduction, Philosophy of religion. Ed. Stanley Rosen. *The philosopher's handbook*. 108.

Aquinas, St. T. 1947. *Summa theologiae.* Trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province. New York: Benzinger Brothers.

St. Augustine. 1909. *The confessions of St. Augustine.* Trans. Edward Bouverie Pusey. New York: P. F. Colier & Son.

Desmond, W. 2000. "Introduction, Philosophy of religion." Rosen, S. (ed.). *The Philosopher's Handbook: Essential Readings from Plato to Kant,* New York: Random House.

Evans, C. S. 2010. "Moral arguments." Taliaferro, C., Draper, P. and Quinn, P. L. (eds.). *A companion to philosophy of religion (second edition),* Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Ganeri, J. "Hinduism." Taliaferro, C., Draper, P. and Quinn, P. L. (eds.). *A companion to philosophy of religion (second edition),* Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

Griffiths, P. J. 2000. "The very idea of religion." *First things. No. 103, May 2000.*

Idowu, E. B. *African traditional religion: a definition*, London: SCM Ltd.

Jordan, M. D. 2005. "History of the philosophy of religion." Honderich, T. (ed.) *The Oxford companion to philosophy (Second edition),* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Oladipo, O. 2004. "Religion in African culture: some conceptual issues." Wiredu, K. (ed.). *A companion to African philosophy,* Malden: Blackwell.

Priest, S. 2005. "Religion and epistemology" Honderich, T. (ed.) *The Oxford companion to philosophy (Second edition),* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sodipo, J. O. 2004. *Philosophy and the African prospect (selected and edited by Fadahunsi, A. and Oladipo, O.),* Ibadan: Hope Publications.

Wainwright, W. J. "Introduction." Wainwright, W. J. (ed.) *The Oxford handbook of philosophy of religion,* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wiredu, K. 2010. "African religions from a philosophical point of view." Taliaferro, C., Draper, P. and Quinn, P. L. (eds.). *A companion to philosophy of religion*, Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

## UNIT 3: PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE

**Contents**



### 1.0: Introduction

Welcome to this unit on philosophy and science. Our focus here will be on philosophy's relationship with science in order to ascertain the soundness of the assumptions and claims made in the area of science. To achieve this, we shall discuss this topic under 4 (four) sub-headings: The Idea of Science; Features and Aims of Science; Philosophy and Science and The Scientific Method. The connection between philosophy and science is hard to dispute; for, even at a point in history, philosophy was described as the queen of the sciences.[148] It is therefore our intention in this unit to examine this relationship by first understanding what science is and then considering how philosophy intervenes in the activities and conclusions of science.

### 2.0: Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

At the end of this unit, the student would have acquired an understanding of:

- what science is, and the different senses of the expression 'science';
- why natural science is implied when the term 'science' is used without specific qualifications;
- the relationship between philosophy and science;

### 3.0: Main Content

### 3.1: The Idea of Science

Etymologically, the English word 'science' derives from the Latin noun '*scientia'* (knowledge) which in turn derives from the infinitive verb '*scire'* (to know). This kind of knowledge is related to the Greek term '*episteme'* (knowledge), which is distinguished from '*doxa'* (opinion) or '*techne'* (skill). In this sense, therefore, science is systematic knowledge and would include every field of intellectual or academic endeavour. Following this understanding, science could be used to describe either the natural or pure sciences, the applied sciences or the social sciences. Natural science refers to those disciplines which make use of natural entities of the physical world as their object of

[148] See, for example, Sodipo, J. O.

study. It refers to the branch of human knowledge which attempts to study and understand these natural entities in order to be able predict certain phenomenon about our physical world. Examples of the natural sciences are Astronomy, Biology, Chemistry, Earth Sciences and Physics. Applied science refers to those disciplines dealing with the art of applying scientific knowledge to practical problems such as Medicine, Architecture, Engineering and Information Technology. The social sciences refer to those disciplines that study human society and institutions as well as the relationship of individual members within society. In other words, it is the science of social phenomena, whose focus is the social aspects of human experience. It is the aspect of human knowledge which attempts to understand general human behaviour in terms of his social, psychological and perhaps his economic environment, in order to be able to describe and explain such behaviours and as well as to also be able to predict such social phenomena, given certain conditions. Such disciplines include Sociology, Psychology, Anthropology, Geography, Economics, Political Science, and History. The foregoing understanding of science made it possible for scholars to talk, for instance, of the 'sacred sciences'[149] which includes theology, exegesis, and so on; or the 'speculative sciences' such as philosophy. Hence, science was then defined as 'organised', 'systematised' or 'classified' body of knowledge which has been critically tested beyond reasonable doubt.[150] However, since the Enlightenment, when the enormous scientific knowledge produced facilitated the affirmation of science's own autonomy and distinct identity, the understanding of science has narrowed down to the natural, experimental sciences. In addition, therefore, to being an organised', 'systematised' or 'classified' body of knowledge, 'tested beyond reasonable doubt', science was then properly defined as "classified knowledge, knowledge systematised and formulated with reference to the discovery of general truths or the operations of general laws, especially when such knowledge refers to the physical world (nature)."[151] Thus, unless otherwise indicated, science is discussed in this unit in this narrow sense.

**3.2: Features and Aims of Science**

**Features**

The following features are some of the hallmarks of science which distinguish scientific knowledge from ideologies, beliefs, metaphysics and religious articles of faith and also they confer on science, the power to uncover the truth about the world as it actually is.

1. Science is Specific

By this, we mean that science deals with particular, observable or identifiable objects of this terrestrial world, rather than with some abstract general ideas or beings. Again, it means that science provides us with information about our world as it actually is. This is the reason the natural sciences are sometimes referred to as the 'exact sciences'

2. Science is Public in Character

[149] St Thomas Aquinas discusses this in the first part of his major work, the *Summa theologica*, Part I, Q I, Art2-Art 5

[150] Nagel, E. 1981 . *The structure of science: problems in the logic of scientific explanation*, New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc. 3.

[151] Aigbodioh, J. 1997. *Philosophy and science: issues and problems*, Ibadan: Hope Publications. 2.

By this, we mean that the techniques and methods, as well as findings and products of science, are not understandable only to a select few, but are capable of being communicated and taught to the generality of persons. For this reason, the conclusions and knowledge claims in the sciences are not only interpersonally verifiable, but are also open to public scrutiny.

3. Science is Impersonal

By this, we mean that science does not involve beliefs or ideals which result from a person's peculiar power of imagination; that science is dispassionate and unprejudiced and that science does not admit of value judgments or arbitrary preferences, as choices are made strictly in accordance with scientific techniques and methods which are objective in character.

4. Science is Objective

By this, we mean that the concepts, laws and theories of science are drawn from the hard and naked facts about the world of everyday perceptual experience. In other words, the objectivity of science derives from the fact that pure facts form the bedrock of scientific theories and discoveries.

**Aims**

In his *The Rationality of Scientific Discovering*, Nicholas Maxwell affirms that the aim of science is simply to discover more and more facts about the world or about the phenomena under investigation, whatever the world or phenomena under investigation, whatever the world or the phenomena may turn out to be like. Here, science is said to be pursued for its own sake, in order to increase our understanding of the world around us. This view has been criticised on the grounds that it divorces science from the practical needs of human beings who see in science, a means of improving their existential condition.

Another view is that the aims of science should be conceived in terms of its utilitarian values. From this perspective, science is not pursued for the sake of the knowledge it gives, but for its economic and technological values or benefits.

A third view which is common to Einstein is that the ultimate goal of science is to explain the world and its phenomena by establishing certain observed regularities about them and conceptualizing or expressing such regularities in the form of hypotheses, laws and theories which would enable us predict future occurrences. The basic assumption here is that the universe is simple, harmoniously united, orderly and beautiful in itself, but that the scientists seek how best to understand the world in these terms.

Although this view has gained popular acceptance among scholars, it cannot however be said to express the complete aim or aims of science, since scientific practices and results are not usually affected by whatever views are held by individual scientists, regarding the ultimate goal of science. It is therefore more plausible to consider a more eclectic approach to the question of the aim of science; an approach that will incorporate all the views so far expressed by various scholars on the question of the aim of science. This can be better achieved by looking at what scientists actually do, rather than what some people believe they do. Scientific activities are readily characterised as acts of explaining, understanding, predicting or describing the occurrences and processes of natural events

and phenomena, and where necessary, inventing, for the purpose of improving existential human condition. This is what G.S. Sogolo means, when he says that science is both theoretically and practically motivated.

**3.3: Philosophy and Science**

The philosophical field of study that deals with science is known as philosophy of science. Even though philosophy has, since the days of the pre-Socratic philosophers, been interested in science, philosophy of science – as a formal, systematic discipline – is a relatively new branch of philosophy, coming into prominence only in the twentieth century.[152] Commenting on this trajectory of historical development and relationship between philosophy and science, John O. Sodipo has this to say,

> Philosophical and scientific thinking were born together in ancient Greece. And through many centuries, especially from the 17th century in Europe, philosophic reflection has been revitalised by fresh contact with the concepts, methods and standards of scientific inquiry. …the history and development of science has shown that the greatest contribution to science has been made by those scientists who possessed what is rightly called philosophic insight.[153]

Until the mid-nineteenth century, therefore, there was no difference between philosophical inquiry and scientific investigation. In fact, science existed as natural philosophy. According to Russell L. Ackoff, in his 1962 work titled *Scientific Method, Optimizing Applied Research Decisions,* "in the days when all scientists were philosophers and most philosophers were scientists, a great deal of attention were given to the way in which knowledge was acquired and justified". Moritz Schlick, the leader of the Vienna Circle, also corroborates this point when he argued that the principles which are needed for the understanding of scientific inquiries are philosophically derived and that they pertain to the branch of philosophy called Epistemology. Schlick insisted that we can only understand scientific inquires in their depth when we provide them with epistemological foundations. This historical romance between philosophy and science explains the concern of philosophy interest with the scientific enterprise.

In expressing this concern, philosophy involves itself in conceptual analysis by defining concepts or problem areas in such a way as to make them susceptible to scientific study. Also, philosophy not only examines assumptions concerning the nature of reality which underlie science, it attempts to fuse the findings of the various branches of science into one consistent view of reality. In doing this, philosophy examines, not only the interrelations among the sciences but also the relation of the sciences with other aspects of civilization and culture.

Although the various sciences have their specific objects of investigation, a common methodological procedure is however discernable among the various specialised

---

[152] French, S. and Saatsi, J. 2011. "Introduction." French, S. and Saatsi, J. (ed.). *The Continuum companion to the philosophy of science*, New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group. 1.

[153] Sodipo, ibid. 17.

sciences. This procedure, by which conclusions and discoveries are alleged to be made in every science, is called the scientific method. Nevertheless, philosophers also raise methodological problems regarding the scientists' use of this method. How for instance can we say that the scientific method is rational and free from *apriori* metaphysical presuppositions? Even more worrisome is the problem of induction which is at the base of most laws guiding explanation in science. How for instance is the inductive method of drawing inferences to be justified? Following the principles of induction, to what extent can we say that scientific predictions are guaranteed by past experiences? Even the scientific practice of confirming and verifying hypotheses raises the question of how massive the supportive evidence for a hypothesis should be, in order for it to rank as a firm and an indubitable knowledge.

At another level, the philosopher raises the question of whether there is an ideal science to which all other sciences are approximations. For instance, the philosopher may want to know whether all the sciences are governed by the same natural laws and theories, and whether the logic of explanation is the same for all the sciences or there are mutually independent modes of explanation. These issues are of serious concern to philosophers. Addressing them does not require any expertise in any or all of the sciences, what is needed is knowledge of the basic presuppositions and logical interrelations of the sciences and these, the philosopher possesses.

French and Saatsi further describe the subject-matter of philosophy of science in these words:

> Broadly speaking, philosophy of science covers issues such as the methodology of science, including the role of evidence and observation; the nature of scientific theories and how they relate to the world; and the overall aims of science. It also embraces the philosophies of particular sciences, such as biology, chemistry, physics and neuroscience, and considers the implications of these for such issues as the nature of space-time, the mind-body problem, and the foundations of evolution.[154]

Philosophy of science simply put, is the application of the philosophical tools of analysis, criticisms, conceptual elucidation, to scientific matters. It strives to evaluate scientific knowledge by investigating the logic and reasoning behind scientific activities and discoveries. Indeed, philosophy of science is involved in the analysis and evaluation of science. Besides the methodological and other issues discussed earlier, philosophy of science is also **interested in the utility and morality of scientific knowledge and projects, the evaluation of scientific results and products, all with a view to seeing whether or not such knowledge, projects, results and products are in conflict with other important values.** Philosophy of science is interested in finding out the extent to which science can actually promote the welfare and civilisation of humanity without

[154] French and Saatsi, p. 1

adversely affecting the rights and interests of human beings and other species of nature. For instance, philosophy of science would reflect on the issue of whether scientific venture should be carried out to improve human lot, in spite of the recognition that such enterprise can adversely affect the environment and other means of survival of future generations and other beings inhabiting the eco-system. These and many other concerns constitute the subject-matter of what is called philosophy of science.

It is important to point out, however, that it is not only philosophy that has a role to play in science; science also has roles to play towards philosophy. A fundamental aspect of this is the fact that science supplies a lot of materials for philosophical reflection, and also throws new perspectives on old philosophical issues.[155]

**3.4: The Scientific Method**

Perhaps the most distinctive issue about science is its method. The scientific method concerns the procedures followed in doing science and achieving the results that are deemed scientific. According to Francis Offor,

> Scientific method refers to the general procedures of carrying out research in the natural sciences. It has to do with the set of rules, norms and criteria governing all the operations and procedures needed to develop a scientific theory and establish a scientific law. As a method of research, the scientific method is said to be identified with a number of procedural stages or steps, although scholars are not generally unanimous about the exact number of research stages in the scientific method.[156]

He goes on to observe that the scientific method may schematically be presented as follows:

1. Observation of a problem
2. Formulation of hypothesis
3. Verification by experience
4. Confirmation of hypothesis
5. Formulation of scientific laws.[157]

According to the entry on the "Scientific Method" in *The New Universal Library*, the basic purpose of scientific enquiry is not to discover masses of isolated facts, but to draw from a specific group of general principles that can be seen to have a wide validity for an understanding of the changing physical world. These general principles are put forward tentatively in the first instance as a guide to further study, so that a further collection of relevant facts is assembled, which in its turn enables modified, or even precise, or perhaps more sweeping generalisations to be drawn up. This in very broad terms

[155] Sodipo, 18.
[156] Offor, F. 1999. "The issues of method in the philosophy of the social sciences." Irele, D. (ed.). *Philosophy, logic and scientific reasoning*, Ibadan: New Horn Press. 156.
[157] Ibid.

describes the inter-relation between theory and experiment. Investigation moves in the direction that theory suggests might be the most fruitful of results, acting as a check on the theory; while at the same time theory strives to subsume all the existing facts that appear relevant into a connected pattern of a logically determinant nature.[158] In science, however, it is important to note the role that induction and deduction play in the scientific method. The generalisations that suggest themselves from a scrutiny of experimental data are merely asserted inductively, and have no necessary logical validity. They become themselves, thereafter however, assumptions in the theory from which conclusions are drawn deductively.[159] Francis Bacon once argued that scientific knowledge is gained and confirmed by a process of induction. But once such knowledge are established, they become the basis for deductive generalisations.

Philosophy of science in recent times, acknowledges the controversy between the Formalist and the Contextualist schools, which largely borders on how best scientific theories, explanatory and predictive powers should be construed. The basic concerns of the schools concern whether there are universalisable formal structure or logical forms into which all scientific theories are analyzable? According to the formalists as represented by Carl Hempel, Ernest Nagel, Wesley Salmon, and Mary Hesse, every scientific theory, as well as the way it serves the purpose of explanation, can be analyzed into a definite logical structure. The contextualists, represented by scholars like N.K. Hanson, Thomas Kuhn, Michael Scriven and Stephen Toulmin argue on the other hand, that there are no logical models into which scientific theories and explanation may be analysed. Instead, the contextualists insist that if we must genuinely assimilate the meaning of scientific theories, we must take into· account the intentions, motives, desires and aspirations of the scientists.

The implication of the foregoing debate is that scientific method may be incapable of explaining much of reality as we should know it. For instance, science basically answers questions regarding the 'What' and 'How' of things. However, the 'Why' questions regarding the religious, moralistic and metaphysical are outside the purview of science. Therefore, science becomes incapacitated in using it method in explaining to mankind, why for instance, humans and animals exist, and why an event occurs as against its non-occurrence. Since, the natural sciences with all their observational and experimental methods are hopelessly handicapped in providing us with ultimate and logical answers to these and many like questions, they cannot be said without equivocation, to explain in the real sense of the world.

Again, scientific explanation is limited only to the perceptible aspect of the object or event to be explained, thereby leaving out those imperceptible aspects which to many philosophers, are the very essence of any explanation. Scientific explanation therefore may not be successful in its explanatory bid in as much as the essences of the issues,

[158] *The New Universal Library*. Vol. 12. London: the Caxton publishing company 1968. 214.
[159] Ibid. 214-215.

concepts, materials and mechanism it strives to explain remained unraveled. As E. W. Hobson explains, natural science describes so far as it can, how, or in accordance with what rules, phenomenon happen, but it is wholly incompetent to answer the question of why they happen; which relates to the essences of the events.

It should be noted also that science in recent times has been facing some catastrophic challenges in its business of explanation even within the confine of its empirical laws and axioms. Science for instance has not been able to explain the operational system of the UFOs- unidentified flying objects. Though, one may be accused of committing the fallacy of hasty generalization or that of ignorance, as scientific experiments in the future may unfold this mystery, but in the light of today's findings, science is yet to provide a satisfactory explanation of that phenomenon.

**4.0: Conclusion**

The prevailing assumption from time immemorial is that science can solve most, if not all of human problems. In the history of science therefore, attempts have been made towards proffering an adequate, effective and sustainable explanation of its teeming phenomena and objects of study, using the scientific method. Examining the relationship between science and philosophy becomes apposite, in order to establish the necessity of a philosophical interrogation of the theories, methods and assumptions of science.

**5.0: Summary**

In this unit, we have among other things, examined the meaning of science in the narrow sense as classified and systematised knowledge, formulated with reference to the discovery of general truths or the operations of general laws, especially when such knowledge refers to the physical world. The historical relationship between philosophy and science with a view to showing the extent of philosophy's involvement in the interrogation of the theories, claims, suppositions and method of science. Finally, the scientific method, which describes the procedures which an investigation has to follow in order to produce a result which can be adjudged scientific was examined, with a view to bringing out its shortcoming in explaining reality as we know it today.

**6.0: Self-Assessment Exercise**

- Attempt a definition of science;
- What do we mean when we say that science is objective, impersonal, specific and public in character?
- Briefly discuss the views of the formalists and the conceptualists on scientific explanation.
- What do you understand by the scientific method
- What would you consider as limitations of the scientific method of explanation?

**7.0: References/Further Reading**

Aigbodioh, J. (1997) *Philosophy and science: issues and problems*, Ibadan: Hope Publications.

French, S. and Saatsi, J. (eds.) (2011) *The continuum companion to the philosophy of science*, London: The Continuum Publishing Group.
Gian-Carlo Rota and Jeffrey Thomas Crants, (2000 ) "Philosophical (and Contradictory) Predictions." Stanley Rosen (ed.). *The Philosopher's Handbook: Essential Readings from Plato to Kant*. New York: Random House,
Hobbes, T. "Leviathan." *The Philosopher's Handbook*, Stanley Rosen (ed).
McCarthy, M. H. (1990) *The crisis of philosophy*, Albany: State University of New York Press.
Offor, F. (1999) "The issues of method in the philosophy of the social sciences." Irele, D. (ed.). *Philosophy, logic and scientific reasoning*, Ibadan: New Horn Press.
Rosen, S. (ed.). (2000) The Philosopher's Handbook: Essential Readings from Plato to Kant. New York: Random House.
Russell L. Ackoff, Shiv K. Gupta and J. Sayer Minas, 1962. *Scientific Method, Optimizing Applied Research Decisions*, New York: John Wiley and Sons.
Sodipo, J. O. (2004) *Philosophy and the African Prospect (*selected and edited by Fadahunsi, A. and Oladipo, O.), Ibadan: Hope Publications Ltd.
Ruse, M. (2005) "Scientific method" Honderich, T. (ed.). *The Oxford companion to philosophy*, Oxford University Press.
Nagel, E. (1981) *The structure of science: problems in the logic of scientific explanation*, New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc.
Noordhof, P. (2005) "Scientism" Honderich, T. (ed.). *The Oxford companion to philosophy*, Oxford University Press.
The New Universal Library. (1968) Vol. 12. London: the Caxton publishing company 1968.

## UNIT 4: PHILOSOPHY AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

**Contents**



### 1.0: Introduction

Welcome to this discussion on philosophy and the social sciences. Our focus in this unit will be on philosophy's relationship with the social sciences in order to ascertain the soundness of the assumptions and claims made in this area of study. To achieve this, we shall discuss this topic under 3 (three) sub-headings: The Notion of the Social Sciences; Philosophy and the Social Sciences; and Critical Theory. If, as emphasised in the last unit, philosophy's role in the physical sciences is crucial, perhaps its interest in the social sciences can be recognised as even greater. This is because, among other things, the social sciences concern human beings who are less predictable than the physical world and so should not be reduced to, or treated as purely mechanical.

### 2.0: Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

At the end of this unit, the student will have a clear understanding of:

- what the social sciences are;
- the sense in which the social sciences are sciences;
- the subject matter and purpose of the social sciences, and
- the relationship between philosophy and the social sciences.

### 3.0: Main Content

### 3.1: The Notion of Social Sciences

As pointed out earlier, if science is an organised body of systematic knowledge, then the social sciences would also qualify as science. The distinction between the social sciences and the natural or physical sciences would therefore lie in what constitutes their subject matter, for while the natural sciences study the physical world, the social sciences study human beings and their social environment. And since the human reality is not exclusively mechanistic, it cannot be reduced to a set of physical attributes or activities which are susceptible to dependable and unvarying measurement. As A. C. Bouquet observes,

> It may be questioned whether a world-view expressing itself in an habitual attitude can be deduced from scientific enquiry as commonly conceived. …the bodies of the sane man, the

> criminal, the lunatic, the genius and the prophet, are all equally matter for scientific analysis, [but] a world-view on a purely scientific basis would seem to be impossible, unless by science we mean more than physical science, and make it embrace an impartial observation of human thought, with deductions therefrom.[160]

The social sciences became a significant branch of intellectual study during the Enlightenment period. This is because it was an offshoot of the clamour for human interests and emancipation that characterised the new mode of thinking in the Enlightenment age. At its inception, the social science was greatly inspired by the logical positivists' position that the empirical method affects a perfect and objective study of all phenomena including the human person and the overall society in which he exists. Social science therefore developed as a result of this new tendency and the underlying presumption that the scientific tool is appropriate and adequate for every intellectual project. The social sciences refer to those disciplines that study human society and institutions as well as the relationship of individual members within society. In other words, it is the science of social phenomena, whose focus is the social aspects of human experience. It is the aspect of human knowledge which attempts to understand general human behaviour in terms of his social, psychological and perhaps his economic environment, in order to be able to describe and explain such behaviours and as well as to also be able to predict such social phenomena, given certain conditions. Such disciplines include Sociology, Psychology, Anthropology, Geography, Economics, Political Science, and History.

The social sciences, therefore, differ from the natural science in several significant ways, one of which is in the application of the scientific method described in the last unit. John Stuart Mill argues that in the social sciences the subject matter is too complex to apply the normal methods of experiment.[161] And Sodipo would further say:

> The more imaginative social scientist is of course aware that the application of the methods and the conceptual categories of the natural sciences, the employment of their ideas of causation, measurement, etc. to the study of society is problematic, and he is exercised by that problem. He therefore realises that there are social situations where what is needed for understanding is not a sophisticated and very complicated mathematical model but a conceptual framework in which sympathetic intuition and imaginative insight would play a crucial role.[162]

---

[160] Quoted in Idowu, E. B.1973. *African traditional religion: a definition*, London: SCM Ltd. 11.

[161] Wilson, F. "Mill, John Stuart" Audi, R. (ed.) *Cambridge dictionary of philosophy (second edition),* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 570.

[162] Sodipo, ibid. 21.

The distinction between the natural and social sciences is also easily seen in the area of causality and prediction. Causal connections are not as readily established in the social science as in the natural sciences, and therefore predictions are less reliable in the former than in the latter. For example, combining hydrogen with oxygen in the right amount gives water. In this example, the combination of hydrogen and oxygen is the cause of water, and it is predictable that, whenever this combination is done in the right proportion, the resultant substance is always water. But in the case of human behaviour, even though there are degrees of probability, it is practically impossible to posit that, for every combination of factors, the results or consequences are definite and invariable. At the same time, the observation of certain phenomena does not necessarily lead to conclusions that cannot vary in any way. As a very simple example, it would be unrealistic to say that, whenever an individual is observed as smiling or laughing, such an individual is happy. This distinction is based on the fact that human beings and their actions are not as predictable as the behaviour of elements in nature. Martin Hollis illustrates this when he argues that, if Africa suddenly becomes much colder, a whole lot of things will change, and that the social effects of this will not be as predictable as the natural effects, because a lot of human variables will intervene in determining what the social effects would be, for individuals as well as communities.[163]
Alex Rosenberg expresses the same issue more theoretically when he asks whether human action can be explained in the way that natural science explains phenomena in its domain:

> If the answer is yes, why are our explanations of human action so much less precise and the predictions based on them so much weaker than explanations in natural science? If the answer is no, what is the right way to explain action scientifically? If there is no adequate scientific explanation of human actions, as some philosophers and social scientists claim, why does human action require an approach different from that of natural science, and what approach is required?[164]

In its quest for an acceptable explanatory model, the social sciences employ the scientific method in their investigations so as to achieve the following objectives:

1. understanding and making more intelligible the behaviour, particularly the social behaviour, of human beings;
2. establishing the governing laws behind most human behaviour;
3. understanding the history of human development, in order to predict in the face of given laws, the future behaviour of man; and

[163] Hollis, M. 2003. "Philosophy of social science." Bunnin, N. and Tsui-James, E. P. (eds.) *The Blackwell companion to philosophy (Second edition)*, Malden: Blackwell Publishing. 375-376.
[164] Rosenberg, A. 2008. *Philosophy of social science (third edition),* Boulder: Westview Press. 5.

4. guiding the behaviour of human beings in a socially desirable way.[165]

The extent to which they are able to achieve these goals is a different issue altogether. At best, one can say that the social sciences offer *functional explanations* of social phenomena. A functional explanation of a social feature, according to Daniel E. Little, "is one that explains the presence and persistence of the feature in terms of the beneficial consequences the feature has for the on-going working of the social system as a whole."[166]

### 3.2: Philosophy and the Social Sciences

Philosophy's relationship with the social sciences is based on the former's role in the analysis and critique of other disciplines. Philosophy of the social sciences, just like the philosophy of science, is out to study the various goals and methods of the social science, with the aim of evaluating whether the discipline is able to live up to the expectation of humanity. Philosophy of the social sciences ponders on certain issues inherited from the philosophy of natural science and also reflects on problems and issues generated by its own peculiar disciplinary orientation. For example, this area of philosophy reacts to the question of the appropriate methodology for the social scientific enterprise, which is an age long problem in philosophy of natural science. As R.S Rudner says in his *Philosophy of Social Science*, "the philosopher of social science is ranged with the philosopher of science in that both focus their attention on problems of methodology.

Some of the central problems that philosophers of the social sciences address include (1) the extent to which one can say that human social life which the social sciences claim to study is, or is not similar to non-human nature which is studied by the natural science; (2) the extent to which human and social experiences can be explainable by using the scientific method; (3) the extent to which the results and findings of the social scientists can be used to predict and control future occurrences in the social world in the same way in which findings in the natural sciences are used to predict and control occurrences in the natural world; (4) the extent of to which the themes, logic and the method of the social science are distinctively peculiar as basis for differentiating the social science from the humanities and for associating the social science with the natural science and (5) the extent to which we can reduce human actions to scientific paradigm which is capable of fulfilling the four goals of science, described by Keith Webb as prediction, explanation, control, and understanding.

While describing the philosophy of the social sciences as the study of the logic and methods of the social sciences,[167] Daniel E. Little goes on to discuss the central questions

[165] Offor, ibid. 156-157.
[166] Little, D. E. 1997."Philosophy of the social sciences." Audi, R. (ed.) *Cambridge dictionary of philosophy (second edition),* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 706.
[167] Ibid. 704.

in the philosophy of the social sciences, questions similar to those enumerated in the last paragraph:

> What are the criteria of a good social explanation? How (if at all) are the social sciences distinct from the natural sciences? Is there a distinctive method for social research? Through what empirical procedures are social science assertions to be evaluated? Are there irreducible social laws? Are there causal relations among social phenomena? Do social facts and regularities require some form of reduction to facts about individuals? What is the role of theory in social explanation? The philosophy of social science aims to provide an interpretation of the social sciences that answers these questions.[168]

Discussing further the main concerns of philosophy of the social science, Alex Rosenberg explains that

> Being clear about a discipline's philosophy is essential because at the frontiers of the disciplines….the unavoidability and importance of philosophical questions are even more significant for the social scientist than for the natural scientist."[169]

He goes on to explain that the only source of guidance for research in the social sciences must come from philosophical theories. "In the end," he says, "the philosophy of social science is not only inevitable and unavoidable for social scientists, but it must also be shaped by them as much as by philosophers."[170]

One major aspect of the relationship between philosophy and social science is that, while social science tries to make sense of social events and data, philosophy, as it were, tries to make sense of the sense which social science is making of social events. Philosophy interrogates the social sciences with the aim of understanding and clarifying, in general terms, the methods, claims and assumptions of the latter. For example, even though the social sciences attempt to collect data and reach conclusions on what accounts for such human values as good, happiness, right, and so on, properly defining those notions in themselves is the function of philosophy.

## Critical theory

[168] Ibid.
[169] Rosenberg, A. 2008. *Philosophy of social science (third edition),* Boulder: Westview Press. 4.
[170] Ibid. 5.

A good example of philosophy's role in the social sciences is seen in the commitment of the Frankfurt School to the 'critical theory of society'. According to James Bonham, critical theory is "any social theory that is at the same time explanatory, normative, practical, and self-reflexive."[171] He also observes:

> Critical theory is primarily a way of doing philosophy, integrating the normative aspects of philosophical reflection with the explanatory achievements of the social sciences. The ultimate goal of its program is to link theory and practice, to provide insight, and to empower subjects to change their oppressive circumstances and achieve human emancipation, a rational society that satisfies human needs and powers.[172]

Max Horkheimer, a philosopher of social science and a member of the Frankfurt School, wrote essays that focus on the relation of philosophy and social science. Besides providing a clear definition and programme for critical social science, he proposes that the normative orientation of philosophy should be combined with the empirical research in the social sciences.[173] His programmatic essays on the relation of philosophy and the social sciences long provided the philosophical basis for Frankfurt School social criticism.[174] For him, critical theory aims at emancipating human beings rather than merely describing reality as it is now.

## 4.0: Conclusion

The social sciences also lay claim to being 'science' based on their use of the method of science. But unlike the latter, the social sciences that deal with human behaviour within the context of man's relationship with other humans in society. For this reason, the social sciences deal with a subject matter that is not as straightforward or as predictable as the physical sciences, a subject matter that is much more complicated. Thus, using the scientific method to the extent that they are amenable, the social sciences seek to better understand and explain the human being and his social environment. Philosophy's interest in the social sciences is to interrogate the method and logic of the social sciences.

## 5.0: Summary

In this unit, we have examined the relationship between philosophy and the social sciences in order to ascertain the soundness of the assumptions and claims made in the social sciences. To the extent that science is described as an organised, systematic

---

[171] Bonham, J. 1997."Critical theory." Audi, R. (ed.) *Cambridge dictionary of philosophy (second edition),* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 195.

[172] Bonham, J. 1997. "Frankfurt School." Audi, R. (ed.) *Cambridge dictionary of philosophy (second edition),* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 324.

[173] Ibid.

[174] Bonham, J. 1997. "Horkheimer, Max." Audi, R. (ed.) *Cambridge dictionary of philosophy (second edition),* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 393.

knowledge, the social sciences also qualify as science, but since the social sciences deal with human behaviour, they differ significantly from the natural or physical sciences. Philosophy of the social sciences attempts to examine this difference by critically assessing the internal logic, assumptions, methodology and claims made in the social sciences.

## 6.0: Self-Assessment Exercise

- What is philosophy of the social sciences?
- Why is philosophy interested in the social sciences
- What are the critical questions addressed by philosophy of the social sciences?
- In what way or ways is the social sciences different from the natural science?

## 7.0: References/Further Reading


Bonham, J. 1997. Audi, R. (ed.) *Cambridge dictionary of philosophy (second edition),* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hollis, M. 2003. "Philosophy of social science." Bunnin, N. and Tsui-James, E. P. (eds.) *The Blackwell companion to philosophy (Second edition),* Malden: Blackwell Publishing.

Idowu, E. B.1973. *African traditional religion: a definition,* London: SCM Ltd.

Little, D. E. 1997. "Philosophy of the social sciences." *Cambridge dictionary of philosophy,*.

Moser, P. K. 1997. "Metaphilosophy" Audi, R. (ed.) *Cambridge dictionary of philosophy (second edition),* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Offor, F. 1999. "The issues of method in the philosophy of the social sciences." Irele, D. (ed.). *Philosophy, logic and scientific reasoning,* Ibadan: New Horn Press.

Rosenberg, A. 2008. *Philosophy of social science (third edition),* Boulder: Westview Press.

R.S. Ruder. 1966. *Philosophy of Social Science.* New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Sodipo, J. O. 2004. *Philosophy and the African prospect (selected and edited by Fadahunsi, A and Oladipo, O.),* Ibadan: Hope Publications.

Wilson, F. 1997. Audi, R. (ed.) *Cambridge dictionary of philosophy (second edition),* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

# Module 4: Branches of Philosophy

Unit 1: Epistemology
Unit 2: Logic
Unit 3: Ethics
Unit 4: Metaphysics

## UNIT 1: EPISTEMOLOGY

**Contents**



### 0.1 Introduction

Welcome to this discussion on Epistemology. We shall be examining this topic under four major parts. The first and second parts will discuss the definition and divisions of epistemology while the third and final parts will dwell on theories of justification and some problems in epistemology. The term ‘epistemology’ etymologically originated from two Greek words; ‘episteme’ and ‘logos’: ‘episteme’ meaning ‘knowledge’ and ‘logos’ meaning ‘science’ or ‘study of’. It therefore follows that epistemology as the science or theory of knowledge is a branch of philosophy that studies the origin and nature of

knowledge as well as the limits and justifications for knowledge claims. Some of the sources of knowledge are; sense experience, intuition, revelation, dream and so on.

The most important term in the description of epistemology is 'knowledge' and the traditional account or definition of knowledge is 'Justified True Belief' (JTB). In a simple analysis, this means, if an individual claims to know something, then, the claim must be true (i.e. it must be a product of proven fact and not opinion which is based on an individual's viewpoint); the individual must believe it and he must be justified in believing it. This position was however debunked by Edmund Gettier who showed that the traditional account was insufficient for knowledge and does not give us certainty, thereby calling for the need of a fourth condition. This implies that knowledge which is often contrasted with belief connotes certainty while belief does not. This is so because a person can believe something, yet does not know it, but no one can claim to know something without believing it.

## 2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

By the end of this unit, you would be able to;

- Define epistemology
- Identify the main divisions of epistemology
- List the theories of justification
- Name some of the problems of epistemology

## 3.0 Main Content

### 3.1 Definition of Epistemology

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge that seeks to answer questions concerning the possibility of knowledge and how knowledge claims can be justified. One of the basic tasks of epistemology is to proffer justifications to knowledge claims such that when a person says he knows something, he can be certain about knowing it and he would not be guessing or trapped in the natural attitude of equating belief with knowledge or opinion with truth. Traditionally, knowledge is known as 'Justified True Belief' which is interpreted as: to claim to know something, one must be justified in knowing it, the claim must be true and one must believe the claim. In epistemology, the way knowledge is acquired is broadly divided into two forms which are Empiricism and Rationalism. We shall now take a proper look at these two divisions.

### 3.2 Divisions of Epistemology

#### 3.2.1 Empiricism

Have you ever tried to share a cultural or religious view with someone and found it difficult to buttress your point with concrete examples? Have you had to explain the notion of angels, ancestors, spirits or God and your listener says, so long as I cannot hear, smell, taste, feel, or see any of these ideas, they are in fact nonsense and do not exists? Such a person with this kind of outlook on life is a typical empiricist. He or she has reduced the whole of reality to the physical. Empiricism as a theory opines that knowledge of any kind is a product of sense perception. It emphasises that our experiences are ultimately reducible to physical evidences. What this implies is that empiricists believe in the priority of sense experience to reason. Knowledge acquired through sense experience is known as a posteriori knowledge which simply means knowledge after experience. This explains why the hypothesized individual above would reject metaphysical concepts like angels, spirit or God, as well as knowledge from intuition or abstraction.

The philosopher, David Hume is a strong advocate of empiricism. He says, **"…If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics; for instance, let us ask, does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion."**[175] Here is Hume dismissing the whole of metaphysical ideas from the realm of knowledge simply because they lack phenomenal or concrete existence. He believes that for any concept to be real, it must be able to create impressions. In other words, it must have a correlate or referent in the world. In this sense, on the one hand, when I say the word 'boy', it has a concrete, verifiable referent and is therefore real. On the other hand, when I say the word 'spirit' it has no concrete verifiable referent and should be dismissed. Hume is of the view that the meaning of a word is in what the word communicates. This means that, referentially, every word must stand for something. Therefore, if we cannot perceive a word's referent and we cannot create an actual image of this referent, then that word is meaningless.

John Locke rejects innate ideas the same way Hume rejects metaphysical ideas. Locke believes that the human mind at birth was a tabula rasa (a clean slate) and that no individual came into this world with inborn ideas, as all knowledge comes from experience. What he means is that we knew nothing prior to being born and that it is only here in this world that we begin to form ideas as we encounter reality through our perception with the five senses. In his work titled 'An Essay Concerning Human Understanding', he stated that all ideas come from sensation or reflection and went on to add that we may suppose the mind to be, as we say, a white paper, void of all characters, without ideas. He asks, how then does an idea enter into the mind? How does the mind form images and create endless variety of memories? What furnishes the mind with all

[175]Hume, D. 2007. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding.* New York: Cambridge University Press. p.144.

the materials of reason and knowledge? To these questions, Locke answers in one word: from EXPERIENCE.[176]

Locke totally believes that nothing enters into the human mind without first passing through the senses. The mind he claims, is incapable of forming its own ideas and is therefore reliant on sense experience for knowledge formation. From Minima's, quotation of Locke in his paper titled 'Problems in Locke's Theory of Knowledge,' Locke admonished thus; Let anyone examine his own thoughts and thoroughly search into his understanding and then let him tell me whether all the original ideas he has there are any other than from the senses; or of the operation of his mind considered as objects of his reflection: and how great a mass of knowledge so ever he imagines to be lodged there, he will, upon taking a strict view see that he had not any idea in his mind but what one of 'these two' have imprinted; though perhaps with infinite variety compounded and enlarged by the understanding.[177]

By 'these two' as stated above, Locke was making reference to (1) simple ideas and (2) complex ideas which he had earlier discoursed in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*'. Simple ideas are basically individual products of experiences as conceived by the senses while complex ideas are formed through a combination of various simple ideas through the power of the mind. For instance, a 'man' is a simple idea, a 'lion' is another simple idea but the combination of the properties of a man and the properties of a lion to create an image of a man with a lion's head would form a complex idea. The senses cannot furnish us with the image of a man with a lion's head, as nothing of such is believed to exist. It takes the power of the mind through reason to create such a complex idea. Meanwhile, reason cannot do this without relying on information from the senses. This is why once again; Locke believes that we cannot find any information in the human mind that is not a product of the senses.

### 3.2.2 Rationalism

On certain occasions, you may have encountered people who speak so highly of ideas or knowledge beyond the physical. Sometimes, we hear people talk about the physical world as being a dream or a mere passage into the real world. Such people may not deny that there is such a reality as the physical world which is accessible by the senses but believe that things in the physical world are mere phenomena or shadows of the ideal, metaphysical or real world which is accessible by reason. Rationalism is that school of thought in epistemology which holds that knowledge comes from reason. It advocates the reality and priority of a priori knowledge, that is, knowledge that is acquired without the aid of the senses.

---

[176] John Locke.1690. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding. Book II. Chapt. I. No.2. content://com.opera.mini.native.operafile retrieved 18th July 2019.

[177] Minimah Francis Israel. 2017. Quoting Locke in 'Problems in Locke's Theory of Knowledge.' international Journal of Arts and Humanities. Vol.6. No.1. s/no.20. p.22.

Plato is a well-known rationalist who made a distinction between the Physical World and the Intelligible World (severally referred to as Ideal or Real World, World of Forms and Ideas). In Plato's theory of the Divided Line, he broadly divided reality into two levels: the intelligible world occupying the higher level and the visible world occupying the lower level and stated thus; "Take a line divided into two unequal parts, one to represent the visible order, the other the intelligible; and divide each part again in the same proportion, symbolizing degrees of comparative clearness or obscurity."[178]

Plato's description is such that the higher level which is occupied by the intelligible world is the world of pure knowledge, rationality, thought and the Forms, while the lower level which is occupied by the visible world is the world of opinion, belief, imagination, things, shadows and images. He believes that things in the visible world have no reality in themselves as they rely on the intelligible world for their reality. This is why he calls visible world a mere phenomenon of the intelligible world, shadow of the Forms or prototype of the archetype.

René Descartes is another rationalist who did not agree that the senses are capable of leading anyone to true, certain and indubitable knowledge. He casts doubts on the senses saying that they are deceptive and unreliable. With this claim, he refuted the position of the empiricists claiming that it is unreliable. He believes that reason alone can furnish a person with the certainty of knowledge. This is because reason is capable of abstraction, intuition and apprehension of reality. He arrived at the ability of reason to attain certainty of knowledge through his principle of the Methodic Doubt. For he said; "Because I wished to give myself entirely to the search after truth, I thought that it was necessary for me to adopt apparently opposite course and reject as absolutely false everything concerning which I could imagine the least ground of doubt, in order to see whether afterwards there remained anything in my beliefs which was entirely certain."[179]

In the process doubting and setting aside all that he ever admitted as true or real, he came to the conclusion that he was certain about the fact the he was thinking. All attempts to doubt the fact of this process was a further confirmation of the existence of his thought. This is not far from the fact that the act of doubting is an act of thinking. Since to doubt is to think, it follows that thought is irrefutable and it takes only an existing being to think. This was how he arrived at his famous dictum, 'cogito ergo sum' (I think therefore, I exist). Descartes's doubt lead him to the discovery of the certainty of thought and the existence of the self.[180]

### 3.3 Theories of justification

One of the conditions for accepting a belief as true is that such a belief must have a justifier. An instance of a justifier would be the availability of proof, evidence or reason

---

[178] William Lawhead. 2002.The Voyage of Discovery. USA: Wadsworth Group. p.51.

[179] Descartes. Discourse on method. In J.O Omoregbe. *Modern Philosophy.* 1991. Lagos: Joja. p.8

[180] William Lawhead. 2002.The Voyage of Discovery. USA: Wadsworth Group. p.232.

given in support of a claim. For instance, if there was no power supply while on your way out of the house, yet you put a cup of water in the refrigerator only to return and discover that there was ice in the refrigerator and the water was frozen. In this situation, the frozen water and the ice in the refrigerator are reasons or proofs which serve as justification for the belief that there had been power supply while you were away.

Theory of justification in epistemology offers a comprehensive and legitimate account for beliefs. Epistemologists are interested in different forms of belief which exhibit justificatory grounds as motivation behind why an individual holds a belief to be either true or false. It is at this point that we see a very close relationship between knowledge and truth. For a claim to pass as knowledge, it must first be true and indubitable. In the event that an individual makes a case, and another at that point offers a reason to doubt it, the proper course of action for the individual who makes the case would typically be to give support or justification for his or her position. Epistemologically, there are different theories for offering justifications for knowledge claims. This includes; correspondence theory, coherence theory and foundationalism.

### 3.3.1 Correspondence Theory

Correspondence as a theory of knowledge justification is very important in the establishment of claims. Newscasters, when reporting a state of affairs from their studio often rely on a correspondence reporter who is present at the scene of the event to provide pictures, audios and videos or conduct interviews in support of the claim made by a reporter in the studio. We see that it is not just enough to report to the world that ballot boxes were snatched during an election. Such a claim, when backed with a correspondence report gives credence to it.

The correspondence theory holds that a fact is an agreement, a harmony or correspondence of a state of affairs with the real world. As it were, a belief must concur with the situation on ground as a general rule before it can pass as convincing. Roderick Chisholm is of the view that, a state of affairs p is identical with a state of affairs q if and only if, necessarily, p 'occurs' if and only if q also occurs. He went on to say in another work that whoever believes p believes q, and vice versa.[181]

For a state of affairs to be true, it must exist and be verifiable. This means that the mode of talking about truth that appears to be most appealing in epistemology is that truth would always have a representation on the ground. This gives us a reason to say that truth is a reflection of reality, as such, whatever knowledge claim that is made must evidently conform to reality. Along these lines, we see that truth produces knowledge. When a state of affair has been established as true or false, the certainty of the status of that condition gives us knowledge about the condition.

### 3.3.2 Coherence Theory

[181] Roderick Chisholm. 1989b: On Metaphysics, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.p.145. Roderick Chisholm. 1976: Person and Object, La Salle, IL: Open Court.p.118.

One way of comprehending the term coherentism is to think about a spider web. The spider begins to spin from a very tiny spot at the middle and continues to form somewhat irregular concentric circles around the spot until it gets big enough to trap insects for food. A careful look at the web would reveal several strands of thread woven to form the web and most importantly, each strand is connected to the next and continuously. The one provides support for the other in a way that leads to the overall strength of the web. In the same way, when a strand is broken, it weakens the overall strength of the web as a whole.

Coherentism holds that a statement is true if there is coherence or agreement between the statement and a systematic body of statements already known to be true.[182] Laurence BonJour stated that "beliefs are justified by virtue of their coherence with each other"[183] and Ernest Sosa is of the view that a belief is justified if and only if it has a place within a system of beliefs that is coherent and comprehensive.[184]

According to coherentists, the primary objects of justification are not individual beliefs but, rather, belief systems. A belief system is justified if other parts of the belief system agrees or coheres appropriately. Individual beliefs are justified by virtue of belonging to such a set of beliefs. Therefore, for the coherentist, epistemic justification is a holistic notion rather than a hierarchical one as implied in foundationalism. The picture is not of basic beliefs being intrinsically justified and then passing on their justification to other beliefs. It is, rather, of justification emerging when one's belief system hangs together, or coheres.[185]

Coherence among beliefs is then, a matter of consistency. If a set of beliefs is inconsistent, it is impossible for all the beliefs in the set to be true, and hence they are not mutually supportive. However, consistency is not enough for coherence; beliefs that are altogether unrelated to one another are consistent, but they are not mutually supportive. Some coherentists suggest that mutual entailment is required for coherence in such a way that every member of a coherent set should be deducible from other members of the set. However, BonJour thinks of coherence as more than mere consistency but less than mutual entailment, saying that it comes in degrees, with the degree increasing with the number of inferential connections among the component beliefs of the set and decreasing with the number of unexplained anomalies.[186] Coherentism is viewed as a denial of foundationalism. It is thus a claim that not all knowledge and justified beliefs rest ultimately on a foundation of self-referential knowledge.

---

[182] J.I Omoregbe, 1998. *Epistemology: Asystematic and Historical Study*. Lagos: Joja Publishing Ltd. p.43

[183] M. Huemer. Ed. 2002. *Epistemology: Contemporary Readings*. London and New York: Routldge. p.370

[184] E. Sosa. 1998. *The Raft and the Pyramid*: Coherence versus Foundations, in the Theory of Knowledge in L.M Alcoff. ed. Epistemology the Big Question. USA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd. p.200.

[185] Foley, Richard (1998) "Justification, Epistemic" Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Version 1.0, London and New York: Routledge P. 4248

[186] BonJour, Laurence (1985) The Structure of Empirical Knowledge, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

### 3.3.3 Foundationalism

When we hear of the word 'foundation', what comes to mind most probably is a building. There can be no building without a foundation. It serves as the base upon which the entire building rests. In addition, as is popularly said, when the foundation is faulty, the building is doomed to collapse. Foundationalism in epistemology entails basic, self-justifying and self-referential beliefs that give justificatory support to other beliefs. Some philosophers who are referred to as foundationalists are of the opinion that just like the building as mentioned above, sure and incorrigible knowledge must be founded on foundations that are already known to be fixed and unshakable.

One might say, with a level of assurance that the primary aim of foundationalists is to invalidate the claim of some skeptics who opine that it is impossible to acquire absolute knowledge. In the event that foundationalists have already lay claim to absolute knowledge, just as would anyone whose claim is rebuffed, it is expected that the foundationalists should offer convincingly justificatory grounds for the legitimization of their position.

Okoye stated that two things are required for foundationalist claim to stand. The first is that there should be an account of known basic beliefs that are indubitable. The Second is that there should be an epistemic assent to what we believe. This for him is what differentiates foundationalism from other justificatory theories. Generally, it is believed that these basic beliefs do not stand in need of justification simply because they are self-evident and other beliefs are justified through them. Therefore, these basic beliefs provide foundations for epistemic justifications.[187]

The construction of a new foundation for any building involves pulling down the entire structure. Rene Descartes who is a popular foundationalist is of the view that it is not simply for aesthetic reasons that a building is rebuilt, because some buildings are rebuilt and modified necessarily in light of the fact that their foundations are defective. His methodic doubt was his own way of reconstructing the entire building of knowledge. He questioned and dismissed everything that beclouds the mind's view in its endeavour to attain certainty. In the process of his doubt, he found a reality that was impossible for him to question or doubt. This reality was the affirmation of his thought. He saw over the span of his doubting process that he could not question or doubt the fact that he doubted. In other words, he could not doubt the reality of the fact that he was thinking. It is this according to Descartes, which lead to the clear proof of his existence. Since to doubt is to think, to think is to exist. He went on to say that; he had chosen to doubt that everything that had been registered in his mind could possibly be products of hallucinations or simply dreams. Yet, almost immediately he discovered that while he was attempting to

[187] Chuka Okoye.2011. Evaluation of Descartes' Foundationalism. UJAH: Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities Vol. 12 No. 1, 2011.P.36.

discredit everything as false, it must be that he who was thinking was in fact something (a being).[188]

This is why Descartes said, I have an unmistakable thought of myself as a thinking, non-extended thing, and a credible thought of my body as extended and non-thinking thing and that the mind which is capable of thinking can exist separately from its body. Along these lines, the mind is a substance unmistakably different from the body and whose nature is thought.[189]

Given that the essential principle of foundationalism as earlier stated is the supposition that there are foundational or basic knowledge from which other non-basic claims are determined, and more so that foundationalism holds that these basic beliefs are self-justifying and therefore need no further justification, Descartes resolved that 'thinking' is the most profound state of affairs that cannot be denied without running into contradiction. Thinking then, became the foundation upon which the entire edifice of his belief system was built. It is from this position that he went on to provide justification for his other epistemic claims about the existence of himself, other beings and ultimately God.

### 3.4 The Problems of Epistemology

From the above, we can tell that there are different positions like empiricism and rationalism when it comes to knowledge claims. In the same way, there are different positions competing for prominence when it comes to offering justification for knowledge such as foundationalism, correspondence and coherence theories. The major problem of epistemology therefore, revolves around responding to the challenges posed by skeptics and being able to offer irrefutable justifications for knowledge claims. We shall now consider a few of the problems.

#### 3.4.1 The Challenge of Skepticism

Skepticism, an orientation in epistemology is constantly challenging the quest for absolutely certain knowledge. The skeptics deny the possibility of certainty in epistemic claims. In fact, there is a sense in which the entire project of epistemology is an attempt to meet this skeptical challenge by proving that knowledge is possible. Skepticism as an idea connotes the critical spirit, the tendency of not being easily satisfied with superficial evidence and striving to accept only incorrigible beliefs that are absolutely certain.

Richard Rorty argued in, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* that "the central problem of modern epistemology is the problem of knowing whether our inner

---

[188] Rene Descartes A. Discourse on the Method. Transl J. Veitch J. M. Deut & Deut & Sons Ltd. 1978, P.27.

[189] Descartes R. (1641), "Meditations on First Philosophy" in the Philosophical Writings of Rene Descartes, translated by J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff and D. Murdoch, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, vol.2, pp. 1-62.

representations were accurate, the problem of knowing how the mind can faithfully represent or mirror an external reality." The sceptical challenge has been instrumental to the advancement of knowledge, as epistemologists on their part have tried to proffer justifications that will stand the criticisms of the most rigorous sceptic. Justification of knowledge is necessary because, when an individual says he knows something, and a sceptic casts doubt on it, it becomes necessary for the claimant to proffer evidence for holding such a claim. For this reason, another task of the epistemologist is to respond to the criticisms of the sceptics thereby advancing the course of knowledge.

There are universal sceptics who claim that no one can know anything at all, believing that knowledge is impossible. Gorgias is an example of an advocate of this school of thought. He believes that "if there is anything, it cannot be known; that if anything can be known, it cannot be communicated by one person to another"[190] therefore, nothing exists. But there are individuals who believe that they at least know some things and are certain about the existence of such things. Descartes who was initially sceptical about all things came to the conclusion that one can at least be certain about his or her existence as a thinking being. There have been responses to absolute denial of knowledge as held by Gorgias.

St. Augustine for instance, is of the view that if anyone says we cannot know anything for certain, we should ask him if he is certain about what he claims. If he says no, we should disregard him for he cannot be taken seriously but, if he says yes, then he should be aware that he is at least certain that he cannot know anything for certain. In other words, anyone who doubts the possibility of knowing anything for certain knows at least one thing for certain, and that is the fact that he doubts.[191] With this response, Augustine was able to show that it is contradictory to hold that knowledge is absolutely impossible.

Immanuel Kant in his work *Critique of Pure Reason* held that, things in themselves are forever inaccessible to the human mind. For him, this is because we only know things empirically through sense experience. Any attempt to begin to find underlying factors or principles beneath things leads to metaphysics. Therefore, we know things as they appear to us. We know them through their attributes and qualities. He concluded that knowledge concerning the soul, the world and God are not genuine because they are "mere thought entities, fictions of the brain, or pseudo objects."[192]

### 3.4.2 The Problem of Appearance and Reality

---

[190] Anthony, K. 2004. *A New History of Western Philosophy: Ancient Philosophy.* New York:Oxford University Press. p.31.

[191] Omoregbe, J. I. 1990. *Knowing Philosophy*. Lagos: Joja Publishers Limited. p.16.

[192] Ayer, A. J. 1936. *The Elimination of Metaphysics*. London and Southampton: Camelot Press Ltd. Par. 9.

The problem of appearance and reality arises as a result of the difficulty in differentiating between them. We often times make reference to the one in place of the other, the same way an uncritical mind finds it difficult to distinguish between knowledge and opinion. The way the world appears to us most times is not what it really is. For instance, when we look into the sky, we see the sun rising from the East and setting in the West. This rising and setting to the ordinary eyes connotes movement but it has been scientifically proven with justification from images taken from the moon that the sun is motionless. Meaning that while the sun appears to move, in reality it does not move.

We may have seen a stick or a rod when partially immersed in a pool of water appearing bent to the sight but when completely out of the water, it is straight. There are instances of mirages and illusions which make us wonder if we can be certain about the true nature of things. If this is the case, what guarantee do we have for our claims to knowledge no matter the epistemic orientation we hold?

## 4.0 Conclusion

We can now appreciate the fact that the task of epistemology is a daunting one. Epistemologists are interested in making our knowledge of the world more clear and distinct. However, there is the need to point out something very important about the empiricists. In fairness to them, we must state categorically that even though the empiricists hold that knowledge is derived from the senses, they do not deny the existence of reason. They admit the important role reason plays in the process of knowledge acquisition by organising sense data in a meaningful and productive manner, but simply emphasise that reason on its own cannot help us with knowledge formation.

## 5.0 Summary

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge that seeks to respond to the criticisms of the skeptics or offer justification to knowledge claims in such a manner that will not be susceptible to doubt. In epistemology, the rationalists display some skeptical tendencies about the claims of the empiricists while the empiricists also cast some doubts on the claims of the rationalists. David Hume, being an empiricist, believes that the only way we can know anything is through sense experience. He distinguished between impressions and ideas, saying that impressions are perceptions which come with experience. Impressions are perceptions of our senses and ideas are pale copies of these impressions. He argues that to have thought or an idea about something, we must have its impression which comes from experience. So, each thought we have, must correspond to an impression. Therefore, our knowledge is strictly limited to impressions. If our reasoning does not involve thoughts which come from impressions, then our reasoning does not have a legitimate ground.

As a way of responding to the criticisms of the skeptics, epistemologists have come up with different positions which they believe would yield certainty of knowledge. While foundationalists believe that incorrigible knowledge must be founded on basic

foundations, coherentists believe that a knowledge claim must agree with a system of beliefs. The correspondence theorists hold that for a belief to count as knowledge, it must have a representation on the ground.

## 6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

- What is epistemology?
- Briefly explain the positions of empiricism and rationalism with regard to knowledge acquisition
- Write short notes on the theories of justification
- Name some of the problems of epistemology

## 7.0 References/Further Readings


Anthony, K. 2004. *A New History of Western Philosophy: Ancient Philosophy*. New York:Oxford University Press.

Ayer, A. J. 1936. *The Elimination of Metaphysics*. London and Southampton: Camelot Press Ltd. Par.

BonJour, Laurence 1985 The Structure of Empirical Knowledge, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Chuka Okoye.2011. Evaluation of Descartes' Foundationalism. UJAH: Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities Vol. 12 No. 1.

Descartes. Discourse on Method. In J. I. Omoregbe. *Modern Philosophy.* 1991. Lagos: Joja.

Foley, Richard 1998 "Justification, Epistemic" Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Version 1.0, London and New York: Routledge.

Huemer. M. Ed. 2002. *Epistemology: Contemporary Readings*. London and New York: Routldge.

Hume, D. 2007. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

John Locke.1690. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding. Book II. Chapt. I. No.2. content://com.opera.mini.native.operafile retrieved 18th July 2019.

Minimah Francis Israel. 2017. Quoting Locke in 'Problems in Locke's Theory of Knowledge.' international Journal of Arts and Humanities. Vol.6. No.1. s/no.20.

Omoregbe, J. I. 1990. *Knowing Philosophy*. Lagos: Joja Publishers Limited.

Omoregbe, J. I. 1998. *Epistemology: A Systematic and Historical Study*. Lagos: Joja Publishing Ltd.

Roderick Chisholm. 1989b: On Metaphysics, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.p.145. Roderick Chisholm. 1976: Person and Object, La Salle, IL: Open Court.

Sosa. E. 1998. *The Raft and the Pyramid*: Coherence versus Foundations, in the Theory of Knowledge in L.M Alcoff. ed. Epistemology the Big Question. USA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

William Lawhead. 2002.The Voyage of Discovery. USA: Wadsworth Group.

## UNIT 2: LOGIC

**Contents**



### 1.0 Introduction

Welcome to this discussion on Logic. The main contents of this topic will be examined under the following four sub-heads: 1. Definition of logic; 2. The laws of thought; 3. The meaning of argument and 4. Divisions of logic. Constantly in our everyday life, we are engaged in thoughts and arguments bordering on several issues ranging from personal ones to the ones that have to do with religion, economics, culture, politics and so on. Logic helps us to cultivate skills for critical thinking and the ability to build proper and convincing lines of reasoning. It helps us to formulate our views and opinions with clarity and precision. Our ability to make unbiased, valid and sound judgements in the course of our arguments depends on our ability to make proper evaluation of such arguments. Logic aids us in developing the ability and skills required for assessing arguments in practical situations and making proper judgements.

According to Gila Sher, We have much to gain by having a well-founded logical system and much to lose without one. Due to our biological, psychological, intellectual and other limitations, he says that we as agents of knowledge can establish no more than a small part of our knowledge directly or even relatively directly. Most items of knowledge, he concludes, have to be established through inference, or at least with considerable help of inference.[193]

### 2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

By the end of this unit, you would be able to;

[193] Gila Sher. 2011. Is logic in the mind or in the world? *Syntheses*. Vol. 181. No. 2. The 37th Annual Meeting of the Society for Exact Philosophy. p. 355

- Define logic
- Explain the divisions of logic
- Explain the laws of thought
- Define argument and name the types of argument
- Evaluate and determine if an argument has committed a fallacy

## 3.0 Main Content

### 3.1 Definition of Logic

There happens to be different conceptions of logic some of which we are already familiar with from our everyday conversations. As identified by Francis Offor, the term logic can be used in at least three different and correct senses which are as follows; (i) the totality of all the laws guiding human thoughts. (ii) the principles guiding the operations of mechanism and (iii) the branch of philosophy that deals with the study of the basic principles, techniques or methods for evaluating arguments.[194]

(i) Logic as the totality of all the laws guiding human thought is predicated on the fact that the ability to think or reason forms a basic and fundamental part of the nature of human beings. Although, some animals like dolphins have been found to possess a good measure of rationality, humans are known to be gifted with the highest measure of reason. The laws guiding human thoughts are mostly self-evident so much so that for human reasoning to make sense, it must conform to some basic laws. When any part of the laws is violated in the course of an argument or reasoning, the listener would most likely identify that something was wrong. Therefore, the laws need not be written down anywhere as we can have direct and immediate knowledge of their violations in expressions. For example, a right thinking person would frown at any assertion which affirms and denies a claim at the same time. For instance; 'it is raining but it is not raining' or 'this is a statue but it is not a statue'. No formal education is needed for a reasonable person to identify that such claims as made above are against reason and should not be taken seriously.

(ii) Logic as the principles guiding the operation of mechanism is a description of the pre-designed codes or programs which control how a particular gadget functions. By this, no gadget such as computer, phone or watch can function beyond what it has been designed or programed for, otherwise, it would be said to be malfunctioning. When this happens, that particular gadget would require the services of a technician in the same way we say that a person whose reasoning violates the laws of thought needs the services of a psychologist or a psychiatrist.

(iii) Logic as the branch of philosophy that deals with the study of the basic principles, techniques or methods for evaluating arguments is a description of logic in the professional sense. Here, logic is concerned with the nature of statements, how

[194] Francis Offor. 2014. *Essentials of Logic*. Revised Ed. Ibadan: BookWright Publishers. P.3.

statements are combined to form arguments, the inferences that follow from the arrangement of statements in arguments as well as the determination of the validity or invalidity and soundness or unsoundness of such arguments. Therefore, logic as the study of the principles for evaluating arguments is aimed at distinguishing good arguments from bad ones, as well as justifying the conditions that make it so.

## 3.2 The Laws of Thought

The laws or principles of thought are those rules guiding human reasoning. They are; (i) The Law of Identity (ii) The Law of Contradiction (iii) The Law of the Excluded Middle

(i) The Law of Identity: this law states that every statement is identical with itself in such a way that if it is the case that 'the sky is blue', then 'the sky is blue'.

(ii) The Law of Contradiction: this law states that a statement cannot be the case, and not be the case at the same time. This means that no statement can be true and false at the same time.

(iii) The Law of the Excluded Middle: this law states that a statement can be either true or false. Therefore, while for the law of contradiction, a statement cannot be both true and false, for the Excluded Middle, a statement cannot be neither true nor false.

## 3.3 The Meaning of Argument

The term 'argument' as used in logic is different from the term 'quarrel' that it ordinarily connotes. "An argument has a structure which is defined by the terms 'premises' and 'conclusion' and the nature of the relationship between them."[195] Going by this definition, there is the need to state what a statement or a proposition is and how they relate to arguments. A statement or a proposition makes a claim that is verifiable as being true or false and it is the arrangement of statements or propositions in the form of premise(s) and conclusion that makes up an argument. It should be noted that an argument could only have one conclusion however; it can have more than one premise.

### 3.3.1 Types of Arguments

There are two types of argument. They are; (i) Inductive and (ii) Deductive arguments.

(i) Inductive Argument: An inductive argument is that argument whose premise(s) provide partial or probable grounds for accepting its conclusion. This means that an inductive argument is not conclusive as it leaves room for some uncertainties.

Example;

Lagos is a beautiful city and it is in Nigeria.
Abuja is a beautiful city and it is in Nigeria.
Port Harcourt is a beautiful city and it is in Nigeria.
Therefore, probably, Nigeria is a beautiful Place.

[195] Francis Offor. 2014. *Essentials of Logic*. Revised Ed. Ibadan: BookWright Publishers. p.10.

In this argument, we can see that from the observation of a number of cities, a probable conclusion that Nigeria is a beautiful place was drawn. This conclusion is probable because it is only when all the cities, towns and villages in Nigeria have been observed and discovered to be beautiful without exception that one could validly infer that Nigeria is a beautiful place. It is for this inconclusiveness that an inductive argument cannot be described as valid or invalid but rather as either strong or weak depending on the weight of support offered by the premises.

(ii) Deductive Argument: A deductive argument is that argument whose premise(s) provide full grounds for accepting its conclusion. This means that a deductive argument is conclusive, as it leaves no room for some uncertainties.

Example;

All Nigerians are Africans.
Jide is a Nigerian.
Therefore, Jide is an African.

In this argument, we can see that from the general knowledge that all Nigerians are Africans it was possible to conclusively infer that Jide is an African because he is a Nigerian. It for this conclusiveness that a deductive argument is described as either valid or invalid. In a valid deductive argument, once the premises of the argument are accepted as true, it becomes impossible to reject or deny its conclusion without violating the law of contradiction, whereas it is possible for the premises of an invalid argument to be true while its conclusion is false.

## 3.4 Divisions of Logic

### 3.4.1 Formal Logic

Formal logic, according to Ekanola, is the aspect of logic that deals primarily with the formal structures of statements and arguments. Its main focus is to determine the status of statements in relation to their logical truths and that of arguments in relation to their validity. In formal logic, the form otherwise known as structure of an argument is very important. This is because the content of a statement or an argument is not necessary in the determination of the truth of that statement or necessary in the determination of the validity of that argument.[196]

There are different formal conditions for statements that are (i) conjunctions (ii) disjunctions (iii) conditionals and (iv) bi-conditionals; without any consideration to their contents.

(i) **Conjunction**: a conjunction is any expression that brings two statements together using words like ‘and’, ‘though’, ‘but’ and so on. In such an expression, it does not

[196] Adebola Ekanola. 2015. The Nature and Scope of Logic. In *Philosophy and Logic : A Critical Introduction.* 2nd ed. D. Irele and A. Afolayan. Eds. Ibadan: General Studies Programme Unit (GSP) University of Ibadan. p.141.

matter what the contents of that statements are, the moment both conjuncts are true, then resulting expression must be true. For example, given that there is a statement 'R' and another statement 'S', where R stands for 'the pear is ripe' or any statement whatsoever and S stands for 'the pear is sweet' or any statement whatsoever; provided that such statements (conjuncts) are joined by any of the words 'and', 'though' or 'but' and given that both conjuncts are true, then the resulting expression 'the pear is ripe and the pear is sweet' must be true. Any other condition represented by such a statement would be false. Therefore, 'R and S' is true only when R is true and S is true at the same time.

(ii) **Disjunction**: in any statement that is a disjunction, it the case that the disjuncts are joined by words like 'or', ' nor', 'either or', as the case may be. It does not matter what the content of that statement is, anytime both disjuncts are false, then the resulting expression must be false. For example, given that there is a statement 'R or S', where R stands for 'the pear is ripe' or any statement whatsoever and S stands for 'the pear is sweet' or any statement whatsoever; provided that such disjuncts are joined by any of the words 'or', 'nor' as the case may be, and given that both disjuncts are false, then the resulting expression 'the pear is ripe or the pear is sweet' must be false. Any other condition represented by such an expression would be true. Therefore, 'R or S' is false only when R is false and S is false at the same time.

(iii) **Conditional** : a conditional statement is one in which the antecedent (the part of the statement which serves as the condition for the other part to follow) and the consequent (the part that follows after the condition) are joined by words like 'if…then…', 'only if' as the case may be. It does not matter what the content of that statement is, anytime the antecedent is true and the consequent is false, then the resulting statement must be false. For example, given that there is a statement 'if R then S', where R stands for 'the pear is ripe' or any statement whatsoever and S stands for 'the pear is sweet' or any statement whatsoever; provided that such a statement is constructed by any of the words 'if…then…', 'only if' as the case may be, and given that the antecedent is true and the consequent is false, then the resulting expression must be false. Any other condition represented by such a statement would be true. Therefore, 'if R then S' is false only when R is true and S is false at the same time.

(iv) **Bi-conditional**: a bi-conditional statement is one in which the component statements are joined by words like 'if and only if', or its equivalents. It does not matter what the content of that statement is, provided that the components have equal truth values, in which case, they are either both true or both false, then that statement must be true. For example, given that there is a statement 'R if and only if S', where R stands for 'the pear is ripe' or any statement whatsoever and S stands for 'the pear is sweet' or any statement whatsoever; provided that such statements are joined by the word 'if and only if' as the case may be, and given that both components are either both false or both true, then the resulting statement must be true. Any other condition represented by such a

statement would be false. Therefore, 'R if and only if S' is true when the components have equal truth values and false when they do not have equal truth values.[197]

For arguments, there are certain forms that are already known to be valid. What this means is that any argument that takes the form of any of them would necessarily be valid. Examples are; (i) Modus Ponens (ii) Modus Tollens (iii) Hypothetical Syllogism (iv) Disjunctive Syllogism (v) Simplification (vi) Constructive Dilemma (vii) Destructive Dilemma (viii) Addition and (ix) Conjunction

(i) **Modus Ponens**:

Example; If John studied law (P) THEN John is a lawyer (Q)
John studied law (P)
Therefore, John is a lawyer (Q)

This form of argument is stating that when we have a conditional statement as the first premise of an argument and we also have a second premise which is an affirmation of the antecedent of the first premise, we can validly infer a conclusion which is an affirmation of the consequent.

(ii) **Modus Tollens**:

Example; IF John studied law (P) THEN John is a lawyer (Q)
John is not a lawyer (~Q)
Therefore, John did not study law (~P)

This form of argument is stating that when we have a conditional statement as the first premise of an argument and we also have a second premise which is a denial of the consequent of the first premise, we can validly infer a conclusion which is a denial of the antecedent.

(iii) **Hypothetical Syllogism**:

Example; IF John studied law (P) THEN John is a lawyer (Q)
IF John is a lawyer (Q) THEN John wins the case (R)
Therefore, IF John studied law (P) THEN John wins the case (R)

This form of argument is stating that when we have two related conditional statements making up the first and second premises of an argument in such a way that the consequent of the first is the antecedent of the second, then we can validly infer a conclusion which is a conditional statement from the antecedent of the first and the consequent of the second.

(iv) **Disjunctive Syllogism**:

Example; EITHER John studied law (P) OR John is a lawyer (Q)
John did not study law (~P)
Therefore, John is a lawyer (Q)

[197] Francis Offor. 2014. *Essentials of Logic*. Revised Ed. Ibadan: BookWright Publishers. Pp.132-135

OR

EITHER John studied law (P) OR John is a lawyer (Q)
John is not a lawyer (~Q)
Therefore, John studied law (P)

This form of argument is stating that when we have a disjunctive statement as the first premise of an argument and a second premise which is a denial of any of the disjuncts, we can validly infer a conclusion that is an affirmation of the other disjunct.

(v) **Simplification**:

Example; John studied law (P) AND John is a lawyer (Q)
Therefore, John studied law

OR

John studied law (P) AND John is a lawyer (Q)
Therefore, John is a lawyer

This form of argument is stating that when we have two statements joined with a conjunction as the premise of an argument, then we can validly infer a conclusion that is an affirmation of any of the conjuncts.

(vi) **Constructive Dilemma**:

Example; If John studied law (P) then John is a lawyer (Q) AND If John wins the case (R) then John will rejoice (S)

EITHER John studied law (P) OR John wins the case (R)
Therefore, EITHER John is a lawyer (Q) OR John will rejoice (S)

This form of argument is stating that when we have two conditional statements joined by a conjunction as the first premise of an argument and given that there is a second premise that is a disjunction of their respective antecedents, we can validly infer a conclusion which is a disjunction of their consequents.

(vii) **Destructive Dilemma**:

Example; If John studied law (P) then John is a lawyer (Q) AND If John wins the case (R) then John will rejoice (S)

Either John is not a lawyer (~Q) OR John will not rejoice (~S)
Therefore, either John did not study law (~P) OR John does not win the case (~R)

This form of argument is stating that when we have two conditional statements joined by a conjunction as the first premise of an argument and given that there is a second premise that is a disjunction of their negated consequents, we can validly infer a conclusion which is a disjunction of their negated antecedents.

(viii) **Addition**:

Example; John studied law (P)
Therefore, John studied law (P) OR John is a lawyer (Q)

OR

John studied law (P)
John is a lawyer (Q)
Therefore, John studied law (P) OR John is a lawyer (Q)

This form of argument is stating that you can form a disjunction of which that statement is a part or you can form a disjunction of two existing statements.

(ix) **Conjunction**:

Example; John studied law (P)
John is a lawyer (Q)
Therefore, John studied law (P) AND John is a lawyer (Q)

This form of argument is stating that from two separate statements, you can infer a conclusion that is a conjunction of the two premises.[198]

### 3.4.2 Informal Logic

Informal logic is the aspect of logic that deals primarily with the nature of arguments in our everyday discourses. The basic concern here is on logical consistencies, persuasiveness and reasonableness of arguments. In this case, when any of these concerns are violated it leads to fallacy.

Kahane defines a fallacy as "an argument that should not persuade a rational person to accept its conclusion"[199] while in Hamblin's view, "a fallacious argument is one that seems to be valid but is not so."[200] For Irving Copi, a fallacy is a type of argument that may seem to be correct but which proves upon examination not to be so. There are two types of fallacies. They are formal and informal fallacies. As discussed under formal logic, arguments that violate the formal structures or rules of formal arguments already known to be valid, commit formal fallacies. In the same manner, when arguments in informal settings present logical inconsistencies or appear to be valid when they are indeed invalid, they commit informal fallacies. We shall now consider a number of informal fallacies broadly grouped into; (a) Fallacies of Relevance (b) Fallacies of Ambiguity (c) Fallacies of Presumption

(a) **Fallacies of Relevance**: usually in fallacies of relevance, the premise(s) of such an argument has no logical connection with its conclusion and is therefore irrelevant for accepting the conclusion.

[198] Francis Offor. 2014. *Essentials of Logic*. Revised Ed. Ibadan: BookWright Publishers. P.163.
[199] Howard Kahane. 1976. *Logic and Contemporary Rhetoric*. California: Wadsworth. P.1
[200] Hamblin C. L. 1970. *Fallacies.* London: Methuen. P.12.

(i) Appeal to Force *(argumentum ad baculum)*

This fallacy is committed when, rather than appealing to the rational status of an argument in influencing the acceptance or rejection of the claim made, the influence of force is invoked upon.

An example is found in the persuasion of UN members by America to endorse Jerusalem as the capital of Israel or forfeit US aids. US went on to say; we will 'take names of those who vote to reject Jerusalem recognition.' Here, the rationale behind voting for or against the motion was subdued and US threatened to withdraw aids as a measure to force the compliance of members.

(ii) Appeal to Pity *(argumentum ad misericordiam)*

When in an argument, a person appeals to pity rather than to reason as a way of influencing others to consider their position, one commits this fallacy.

An example is when a woman approached a bank for a business loan without a business plan or collateral. When asked to state why her request should be granted, she simply said, 'because I am a widow.' Being a widow in this case is not the condition required for getting a loan from the bank as she was rather appealing to pity.

(iii) Appeal to Emotion *(argumentum ad populum)*

When a person beclouds the reasoning processes of people in making informed judgement by appealing to their emotions, one commits this fallacy.

An example is a Nigerian politician from the northern part of the country who visits the southern part on a campaign rally dressing like a southerner. The intention being to look like the people and showing that he or she appreciates their culture. But as soon as elections are over with, they do away with the materials.

(iv) Appeal to Authority (*argumentum ad verecundiam)*

According to Francis Offor, this fallacy "involves the mistaken supposition that there are some connections between the truth of a proposition and some features of the person who asserts or denies it. When the opinion of someone famous or accomplished in another area of expertise is appealed to in other to guarantee the truth of a claim outside of the province of that authority's field, this fallacy is committed."[201]

An example is found in the Sultan of Sokoto personally immunising his grandchildren against polio as a way of convincing his people to accept polio immunisation. In other words, if the Sultan of Sokoto personally immunised his grandchildren against polio Then, immunisation against polio is not harmful.

In this situation, it is possible for a professor of medicine to educate the people of the importance of polio immunisation and not to be taken seriously. However, when the Sultan who probably knows nothing about medicine but because he is highly respected makes the same claim, his opinion is respected beyond that of the expert.

[201] Francis Offor. 2014. *Essentials of Logic*. Revised Ed. Ibadan: BookWright Publishers. P.42.

(v) Argument Against the Man *(argumentum ad hominem)*

*Argumentum ad hominem* could be either 'abusive' or 'circumstantial'. In the first instance, we attack the messenger rather than the message while in the second we argue against the circumstance of the opponent.

Examples:

John's argument that abortion should be rejected is meaningless, because he doesn't think straight.(Abusive).

You should agree with me that the Yorubas are well educated. After all, you are a Yoruba person (Circumstantial).

(vi) Appeal to Ignorance *(argumentum ad ignorantiam)*

This fallacy is committed when a person claims that a statement is true for the reason that it has not been proven to be false or that it is false because it has not been proven to be true.

An example is: The notion of heaven is a fiction because no one has been able to prove that heaven exists.

(b) **Fallacies of Ambiguity**: fallacy of ambiguity results when a particular word or an idea is used in more than one sense in a single argument.

(i) Fallacy of Equivocation

Example includes;

A bank is a place where money is kept.
A river has a bank.
Therefore, the bank of a river is a place where money is kept.

(ii) Fallacy of Division

This fallacy occurs when the features of a group is assumed to be possessed by the individual members of the group.

Example includes;

All Nigerians smile in the face of poverty.
Jide is a Nigerian.
Therefore, Jide smiles in the face of poverty.

(iii) Fallacy of Composition

This fallacy occurs when the features of individual members of a group are attributed to the entire group.

Example includes;

Lagos is a beautiful city and it is in Nigeria.

Abuja is a beautiful city and it is in Nigeria.
Port Harcourt is a beautiful city and it is in Nigeria.
Therefore, Nigeria is a beautiful Place.

(c) **Fallacies of Presumption**: these kinds of fallacies result from the imprecisions or uncertainties in the use of words.

(i) False Cause

There are two forms of this fallacy.

- *Non causa pro causa*: This fallacy results when we assume that A is the cause of B when there is no causal connection between A and B.
  Example; The parrot sang beautifully during planting season and the harvest was bountiful. Therefore, the parrot caused the increase.
- *Post hoc ergo propter hoc*: This fallacy occurs when one particular event follows immediately after another and we assume that the one is the cause of the other when indeed, it is not the case.

  Example; Thunder usually follows after a bright lightning.
  Therefore, the lightning is the cause of thunder.

(ii) Complex Question

A complex question is one which contains at least two questions, one of which is implied, and in which an affirmative answer to the implied question is already presupposed, irrespective of whether or not the main question is answered in the affirmative or in the negative. In other words, this fallacy is committed when one draws a conclusion from a yes or no answer to a question that is loaded. A complex question, therefore, is one in which a simple yes or no does not absorb a person of guilt.

Example;
Question -: Have you stopped stealing?
Answer-: Yes. (This would imply that the person used to steal)
Answer-: No. (This would imply that the person still steals)

(iii) Begging the Question

This fallacy is committed when one assumes as a premise of an argument the conclusion to be proven.

Example; The universe is an endless space because the universe is endless.

## 4.0 Conclusion

Philosophy generally is basic to all areas of human inquiry, be it the sciences, the social sciences, the arts or humanities, but logic itself is the basis on which philosophy thrives. Philosophy deals with reasoning and logic is the study of the proper way to reason. This shows that if as human beings we cannot escape philosophy, then we also cannot escape

logic. Any person or society that rejects logical or sound philosophical principles runs into chaos and disorder. This is why Socrates believes that the world would continue to be a terrible place until philosophers become rulers or the rulers themselves become philosophers.

## 5.0 Summary

We have been able to explain that logic is the study of the basic principles for evaluating arguments and that some of these principles are; the principle of identity, the principle of contradiction and the principle of the excluded middle. We also stated that an argument is divided into two parts known as the premise(s) and the conclusion and that the premise(s) provide reason(s) for accepting the conclusion. Another point to remember is that every single argument can have as many premises as possible but it can only have one conclusion. It is also necessary to note that it is only statements otherwise known as propositions that can be described as true or false while only deductive arguments are capable of being valid or invalid. Another basic concern of logic is on the logical consistency, persuasiveness and reasonableness of arguments. Where an argument violates any of these concerns, it becomes a fallacy.

## 6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

- What is the meaning of logic in the professional sense?
- What are the divisions of logic?
- List and explain the three laws of thought
- What is an argument?
- What is a fallacy?
- Name the fallacy committed by each of the following arguments:

1. Mr. Sikiru, I certainly deserve a raise in pay. I can hardly manage to feed my children on what you have been paying me. And my youngest child, Tim, needs an operation if he is ever to walk without crutches.

2. But can you doubt that air has weight when you have the clear testimony of Aristotle affirming that all the elements have weight including air, and excepting only fire?

3. The Leeds City University has just received an excellent rating as one of the best universities in Nigeria. Therefore, it must have a first-rate Faculty of Law.

4. There must be ghosts because no one has proved that there aren’t any.

5. Surely you welcome the opportunity of joining our protection organization. Think of all the money you will lose from broken windows, overturned trucks, and damaged merchandise in the event of your not joining.

## 7.0 References/Further Reading

Adebola Ekanola. 2015. The Nature and Scope of Logic. In Philosophy and Logic : A Critical Introduction. 2nd ed. D. Irele and A. Afolayan. Eds. Ibadan: General Studies Programme Unit (GSP) University of Ibadan.

Francis Offor. 2014. Essentials of Logic. Revised Ed. Ibadan: BookWright Publishers.

Gila Sher. 2011. Is logic in the mind or in the world? Synthese. Vol. 181. No. 2. The 37th Annual Meeting of the Society for Exact Philosophy.

Hamblin C. L. 1970. Fallacies. London: Methuen.

Howard Kahane. 1976. Logic and Contemporary Rhetoric. California: Wadsworth.

## UNIT 3: ETHICS

**Contents**



### 1.0 Introduction

Welcome to this discussion on Ethics. The contents of this topic will be examined in four sub-sections: 1. Definition of ethics; 2. Value judgements; 3. Ethical theories and 4. Moral dilemmas. The question of how the idea of ethics came about has been a recurring one. Is ethics an intrinsic part of human nature or is it an idea that developed out of socialisation? Stuart is of the opinion that "If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary."[202] However, men are not angels and angels do not govern men. The story of Alexander Selkirk's solitary sojourn on 'Mas a Tierra Island' now popularly known as 'Isla Robinson Crusoe' easily comes to mind when one begins to ponder on whether or not it is possible to conceive of any ethical or moral principle when in isolation. One ethical question which shows whether an action is right or wrong is, 'who does the action hurt?' If no one is hurt, probably then, no wrong has been done and going by the egoistic nature of man, that is, the desire to always follow one's self interest, no one would under normal circumstances want to hurt him or herself. The implication of this is that, without the 'Other', judgements about rightness or wrongness

[202] Stuart C. Gilman. 2005. *Ethics codes and codes of conduct as tools for promoting an ethical and professional public service: Comparative Successes and Lessons.* Prepared for the PREM, the World Bank Washington, DC. Winter 2005. p.7

of human actions would be unnecessary. Hence, whatever activities Alexander Selkirk engaged in on the island cannot be said to be right or wrong, moral or immoral.

As humans, the obvious situation before us is that we do not live in isolation; we live with others. There is a school of thought that holds that humans should be altruistic, that is, they should act in the interest of others. Yet, another school of thought, the utilitarian school holds that not just the interest of the self or the interest of others should be put into consideration when we act, rather, we should consider the interest of everyone with preference to the highest number, hence, the popular maxim 'the greatest good to the greatest number.' The arguments among the egoists, the altruists, and the utilitarians on the rightness or wrongness of human actions will show that there are different approaches to the way we judge human actions to be either right or wrong.

## 2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

By the end of this unit, you would be able to;

- Define Ethics
- Identify and explain some ethical theories
- Understand and resolve moral dilemma
- Apply ethical theories to real life situations

## 3.0 Main Content

### 3.1 Definition of Ethics

Ethics has a very close link with morality. The idea of morality can be traced to when humans started living in societies and began to distinguish between good or acceptable and bad or unacceptable ways to relate with others. It is these acceptable and unacceptable ways that developed into customs, ways of life and codes of conduct of a people which now constitute the interest and subject matter of ethics. What then is ethics? It refers to "a code or set of principles by which men live."[203] It is a branch of philosophy also known as moral philosophy, that prescribes how men ought to behave and live the 'good life'. "Just as logic is the systematic study of the fundamental principles of correct thinking, and theology is the systematic study of the fundamental tenets of religion, ethics is the systematic reflection on our moral values or beliefs".[204] This, therefore, gives us insights that ethics could only have come into existence when human beings started to reflect on the best way to live. This reflective stage emerged long after human societies had developed some kind of morality, usually in the form of customary standards of right and wrong conduct. The process of reflection tended to arise from such customs, even if

[203] Popkin, R.H and Stroll, A. *Philosophy Made Simple*. London: W. H Allen. 1969. p.1.

[204] C. O Agulanna. *Moral Theories and Ethical Principles*. Lecture delivered at a 2 Day Course in Medical Ethics Organized by West African College of Physicians 28th-29th July, 2011.p.7.

in the end, it may have found them wanting. Accordingly, ethics began with the introduction of the moral codes.[205]

## 3.2 Value Judgements in Ethics

We can only arrive at judgements concerning wrongs or rights when the agent involved has an alternative or alternatives opened to him or her. In other words, the agent must have the freedom to make choices. It is at this point we begin to ask why the individual choses to act in a particular way and not the other. It is this, therefore, that warrants the apportioning of praise or blame as the case may be. When we do this, we invariably show that the agent or individual is responsible for his or her action. In a situation where no option is available and no room for choice is open, the agent or individual would act necessarily and his or her actions cannot be judged to be right or wrong, praiseworthy, or blameworthy. This is because the agent or individual was not responsible for the action taken and "no one should be punished for what he cannot help."[206] Since it is our idea of right and wrong and the responsibility of the agent involved that leads us into making moral or ethical judgements, one would want to ask, how should we judge the actions of infants and the mentally deranged persons since they cannot be held responsible for their actions, knowing that they do not act based on rational judgements and therefore cannot make informed decisions and choices? Can we refer to their actions as moral or immoral? The answer is an obvious No!

When we use the terms ethical or moral, we clearly as will be shown later, have certain agents in mind. The terms ethical and moral are used only when the agent involved can be held morally responsible for their actions or conducts. In this case, only responsible humans fall within this category. Animals cannot be said to have acted in a moral or an immoral manner and therefore cannot be held responsible for any of their actions. Infants cannot be said to be moral or immoral and likewise the mentally deranged no matter what they do. This is because they do not have the knowledge of right and wrong and cannot rationally make a distinction between them. A dog may kill another dog or harm a human being. This action may result in the entire community hunting around for the dog and probably killing it. However, the killing of the dog cannot be viewed as punishment because the dog cannot be placed on a scale of moral judgement. Let us also consider this example; when a child puts off his or her clothes, jumps into the rain, begins to dance as he or she takes his or her bathe in public view, no one would frown at such an action, when a mentally deranged person does this, people will overlook it but, when a full grown and responsible adult male or female does this, the response of members of the society would certainly be quite different. This is because the actions of the child and the mentally deranged cannot be judged to be moral or immoral but amoral. Let us take a clear look at the meaning of the terms moral, non-moral, immoral, and amoral.

---

[205] Zaine Ridling, 2001. Philosophy Then and Now: A Look Back at 26 Centuries of Thought. *Access Foundation*. p.963

[206] Roger Crisp. ed. 1997. Mill on Utilitarianism. New York: Routlegde. P.160.

We have previously considered the meaning of the word moral which we said have to do with good or bad with reference to ethical codes or laid down rules. We also said that the term is best suited for responsible humans. The term immoral is the direct opposite of moral. It means to be morally wrong or morally bad such that it could attract blame and punishment. Responsible humans are also the culpable agents involved here. The literal meaning of the word 'amoral' is 'non-moral'; this means that what is being referred to has nothing to do with morality since the agents involved cannot be held morally responsible. The word is therefore best suited for animals, mentally deranged persons and human infants.[207]

There are also, terms that have to do with manners and social etiquettes which are sometimes used in close relation to morals and ethics in our day-to-day life. In fact, we sometimes make no distinction in their usage from when we are talking about morals, when indeed they are actually outside the realm of ethics or morals. Ethics and morals as have been stated, are concerned with right and wrong, good, and bad conducts but matters of manners and social etiquettes are concerned with preferences, predilections, or tastes and could be described as non-moral. There is a familiar practice in some parts of Nigeria for instance where children are scolded for eating or receiving presents with their left hand. There are practices also especially in the Yoruba speaking areas of the country where it is believe that males should prostrate to greet an elderly person while the females kneel down to do so. These practices have nothing to do with right or wrong, good or bad because they are simply matters of preferences. Therefore, a male who decides to kneel down to greet an elderly person and a female who decides to prostrate to do the same may not have conformed to the ethos of the social group in terms of way of greeting, but he or she cannot be said to have acted immorally. Besides, there are some other cultures in the country especially that of the Hausa/Fulani speaking areas where males kneel down and do not bow down to greet.

## 3.3 Ethical Theories

### 3.3.1 Absolutism

Absolutism according to Plato is the view that, "there is fundamentally one and only one good life for all men to lead". This is because goodness is not dependent upon men's inclinations, desires, wishes, or upon their opinions. Goodness in this respect resembles the mathematical truth that two plus two equals four. This is a truth which is absolute; it exists whether any man likes such a fact or not. It is not dependent upon men's opinions about the nature of mathematics or the world. Likewise, "goodness exists independently of men and remains to be discovered if men can be properly trained."[208] This view holds that truth is absolute and unchanging, in other words, a moral truth certainly holds for all men no matter their views or orientation. This position also holds that the analysis of the

[207] Uduigwomen, A. F. 2006. Introducing Ethics: Trends, Problems & Perspectives. Calabar: Jochrisam Publishers. p.6-8.
[208] Popkin, R. H. and Stroll. 1969. A Philosophy made Simple. London: W. H. Allen. P.1

situations leading to human actions do not really matter, rather, what matters is whether that particular action has been upheld as wrong or right. The divine command theory is evidently an example of an absolutist theory. 'Thou shall not kill' which is one of the Ten Commandments of God given to the Judeo-Christians as found in the Bible is believed to be absolute. No matter the circumstances involved, killing is never to be permissible.

### 3.3.2 Relativism

Relativism is the belief that ideas like right and wrong are not absolute but subject to individual interpretations. It advocates that another may consider an action that is judged right by one individual wrong. Killing which is absolutely wrong for an absolutist may be judged right by a relativist given certain conditions. Abortion for example may be seen as absolutely wrong by the absolutists simply because it involves putting an end to the life of the unborn that is believed to have full right to life. However, for the relativists, this should not be the case because they believe that there are likely instances where an abortion becomes necessary, especially when the life of the mother who also has full right to life is at risk.

### 3.3.3 Situationism

Situationism is an ethical theory that is associated with Joseph Fletcher. It advocates that, the morality of any action is determined by the situation in which the action is performed and that it is not the nature of the act or the consequence that determines whether the act is right or wrong.[209] Therefore, there are no universal moral rules as each case is unique and deserves a unique solution. This theory is pragmatic in nature as it appropriates the notion of workability. This means that provided a particular action works and is relevant to the particular situation then, the means by which that action was achieved does not really matter. It is believed that an action might be right in one situation but wrong in another. Situationism prescribes that the moral choices and decisions we make should be founded on the basis of a specific circumstances that are motivated by love and not based on rigid laws. Love is believed to justify all actions no matter the means employed, so Justice is not in the letter of the law but in the distribution of Love.

### 3.3.4 Altruism

The term 'altruism' was invented by the Philosopher Auguste Comte from the French word *altruisme*. He also related it with its Italian equivalent *altrui*, which in turn was derived from Latin *alteri*, meaning 'other people' or 'somebody else'.[210] A particular human conduct is ordinarily portrayed altruistic when it is driven by an intention to profit somebody other than oneself. An individual, who without self-interest or any benefit donates his blood to save the life of a complete stranger who was involved in a fatal accident performs an altruistic act. Altruistic acts include not only those undertaken in

[209] Uduigwomen, A. F. 2006. Introducing Ethics: Trends, Problems & Perspectives. Calabar: Jochrisam Publishers. p.72.
[210] Ciciloni, Ferdinando. 1825. *A Grammar of the Italian Language*. London: John Murray. p. 64.

order to do good to others, but also those undertaken in order to avoid or prevent harm to them. Suppose, for example, someone drives his car extra cautiously because he sees that he is in an area where children are playing, and he wants to insure that he injures no one, it would be appropriate to say that his caution is altruistically motivated. He is not trying to make those children better off, but he is being careful not to make them worse off. He does this because he genuinely cares about them for their sake.[211]

### 3.3.5 Egoism

Thomas Hobbes is of the opinion that humans by nature are self-interested and any show of concern for others hides a true concern for ourselves. For example, he believes that humans choose to move from the state of nature and to embrace the social contract which enjoined them to live in a society with rules because they are concerned with their own protection and for no other reason. Egoism therefore, is the view that places self-interest at the centre of morality. It holds that a person has a moral obligation to pursue only those things that are best for him or her. From this, we can see that egoism is the opposite of altruism which believes in the practice of doing things to benefit others, without expecting any benefit for oneself.

### 3.3.6 Teleologism

Etymologically, the term Teleologism is derived from the Greek word *telos* which means 'end'. Teleologism is, therefore, an ethical theory that is concerned with the consequence or end result of an action rather than the motive behind the action. Teleologism also known as consequentialism has been described as a theory that is "based on the notion of choosing one's action so as to maximize the values to be expected as consequence of those actions."[212] In the views of Jeremy Bentham and J. S Mill holds, there can be only one ultimate standard of conduct which is teleological and driven towards the promotion of happiness. Mill's support for this position is clearly seen in his assertion that, "the general principle to which all rules of practice ought to conform, and the test by which they should be tried, is that of conduciveness to the happiness of mankind, or rather, of all sentient beings: in other words, that the promotion of happiness is the ultimate principle of Teleology."[213] By teleology, he means an ethical approach or evaluation of actions that is concerned with utility or a desired end result.

### 3.3.7 Deontologism

[211] Kraut, Richard. 2018. Altruism. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edward N. Zalta. Eds. Retrieved from https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/altruism/. Accessed: 21/08/2019. Par.5.
[212] Hull, R.T. The variety of Ethical Theories, Given at Buffalo Psychiatric Centre, March 27, 1979. p.1.
[213] Mill. p.120. quoted in Roger Crisp. ed. 1997. Mill on Utilitarianism. New York: Routlegde. P.160.

Deontologism, from its etymology from the Greek word *Deon* means that which is necessary or binding. It is an ethical theory which is based on the notion of choosing one's actions according to standards of duty or obligations that refer not to consequences but to the nature of actions and motives that are held by those performing them. Deontologists agree on the basic principle that an action is morally right if it is required by duty or permitted by duty. They are opposed to purely consequentialist moral thinking. Some variations of deontologism are: act deontologism which holds that every judgment of moral obligation is a function of a particular act as demanded by one's duty, and rule deontologism which holds that there is a non-teleological standard of duty consisting in one or more rules, such that ones duty in any situation consists in acting so as not to violate any of those rules.[214]

They are of the opinion that if an action is your duty, you ought to do it regardless of your desire-based interests. An agent who acts from duty is believed to be motivated by the legislative form of the maxim: The agent's reason for acting is the fact that the action is morally required.[215] Deontologism is practically in conflict with teleologism as identified above because of the claim that the rightness or wrongness of an action does not depend on the aim or the end result of the action but that it depends on the kind of action taken. Therefore, when an action is either right or wrong, it is either intrinsically wrong or intrinsically right. This is where the religious rule deontology takes its course from. Example is the absolutism of the divine command theory. This would prompt a person to ask if an action is right or wrong because God says so or that it is right or wrong because it is intrinsically right or wrong. Deontologists favour the later. Deontologism therefore is a rigid non-consequentialist philosophy which is concerned with the notion of obligation and duty.[216]

### 3.3.8 Kant's Categorical Imperative

Immanuel Kant in his ethical theory of categorical imperative tells us what we ought to do, without any prior conditions, subjective wishes or qualifications. He expresses the first version of his categorical imperative by saying that everyone should act only according to the maxim by which he or she can at the same time will that it should become a universal Law.[217]

A maxim is a general rule that tells us what we should and should not do. What Kant implies is that we are to decide and use the maxim that establishes our actual moral obligations. Kant's criteria for universalizing our maxims capture some of our everyday moral institution. It also shares conformity with the Golden Rule of the Gospel. 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you'. Kant further advocates in his categorical

[214] Hull, R. T. *The variety of Ethical Theories*, Paper presented at Buffalo Psychiatric Centre, March 27, 1979. p.1.
[215] Reath, A. 2006. Kant's Critical Account of Freedom. Graham Bird. ed. *A Companion to Kant*. USA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd. p.289.
[216] Popkin, P.H and Stroll, A. 1969. *Philosophy Made Simple*. London: W. H Allen. p.50.
[217] Lawhead, W.F. (2002) The Voyage of Discovery, A Historical Introduction to Philosophy, 2nd ed., U.S.A. Wadsworth Group. p. 324.

imperative, that we act so that we treat humanity, whether in our own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only.[218] What Kant is emphasizing here is that each person has intrinsic worth and dignity and that, we should not use people or treat them like objects. Kantianism is therefore a deontological theory of ethics which holds that moral rules should be universalisable and that it should be applicable to the generality of people.

### 3.3.9 Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism which is based on the principle of utility, is the view that the goal of every action should be to promote the greatest welfare of the greatest number of people.[219] In the promotion of this greatest welfare of the greatest number of people, some believe that emphasis should be placed on the action in question and nothing more. This is the view that is referred to as 'Act utilitarianism'.

Act utilitarianism is concerned with the consequences involved in any act. For instance, for a lie to be judged morally wrong, one should first weigh its consequences with reference to its ability to promote the greatest welfare. If an assassin comes after one's father who is hiding somewhere inside the ceiling which one is aware of and the assassin asked about his where-about, what should one's response be? Remember that denying knowledge of the whereabouts of one's father in this case is to not tell the truth which is equivalent to telling a lie in the view of the absolutists. For the act utilitarians, there is nothing morally wrong in this act since it is intended to protect life and at the same time promote the welfare of the individual who is probably the breadwinner of his family. It is the performance of the act that advances the welfare of the greatest number of persons without giving considerations to societal, religious or legal constraints.

Rule utilitarianism on the other hand considers the general consequences of actions such as the rule that lying is a distortion of facts and is generally bad for the society. In this case, rules are considered valid if and only if their consequences promote the general good.

## 3.4 Moral Dilemmas

It is very possible to run into serious ethical or moral dilemmas in our value judgements in the process of our conducts and interactions with people in the society. A dilemma is a situation where we find it difficult to make a moral choice simply because the alternatives before us are all unsatisfactory. It is like trying to choose between two evils.

---

[218] Lawhead, W.F. (2002) The Voyage of Discovery, A Historical Introduction to Philosophy, 2nd ed., U.S.A. Wadsworth Group. p. 324.

[219] Uduigwomen, A. F. 2006. Introducing Ethics: Trends, Problems & Perspectives. Calabar: Jochrisam Publishers. p.42.

A very good example is seen from the Bergmeier's family that got scattered because of the World War II. The man was taken as a war prisoner and confined at a prison in Wales while the wife was also captured and confined at a prison camp at Ukraine, and their children were scattered all over the places. Not too long, the man got his freedom and after a period of intense searching, was able to re-gather all his children. However, unfortunately, none of them knew the whereabouts of his wife. News later filtered to the woman that members of the family had come together again and were seriously looking for her. All efforts to gain her release proved abortive as she did not meet the only two conditions for release; serious illness and pregnancy in case of women. The woman was in a dilemma of choosing between committing adultery and remaining in prison. She finally chose one of the two evils. She arranged with one of the prison guards to get her pregnant, gained her freedom and joined her family.[220]

## 4.0 Conclusion

Moral judgements about anything at all are usually value laden. The way individuals or societies judge human actions to be either right or wrong show the value they place on such actions. This is why we hear of taboos and we hear of praise or blameworthy actions. For an action to be judged wrong for example, it must have violated at least a part of the moral codes or laid down rules which usually attract blame or punishment.

## 5.0 Summary

In this unit, we have described ethics (also known as moral philosophy) as a branch of philosophy that prescribes how men ought to behave and live the 'good life'. We have also looked into some of the theories of ethics such as; Relativism which is the belief that ideas like right and wrong are not absolute but subject to individual interpretations; Situationism which holds that there are no universal moral rules as each case is unique and deserves a unique solution; Altruism which holds that a particular human conduct is driven by an intention to profit somebody else, other than oneself; Egoism which places self-interest at the centre of morality and holds that a person has a moral obligation to pursue only those things that are best for oneself; Teleologism which is concerned with the consequence or end-result of an action rather than the motive behind the action; Deontologism which is based on the notion of choosing one's actions according to standards of duty or obligations; Categorical Imperative which holds that everyone should act only according to the maxim by which he or she can at the same time will that it should become a universal law, and Utilitarianism which advocates that every action should promote the greatest welfare of the greatest number of people. Finally, we examined moral dilemma which is a situation that presents difficult moral choice simply because the alternatives before us are all unsatisfactory.

[220] Uduigwomen, A. F. 2006. Introducing Ethics: Trends, Problems & Perspectives. Calabar: Jochrisam Publishers. p.72.

## 6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

- What is Ethics?
- Briefly explain each of the following ethical theories:

  1. Relativism
  2. Absolutism
  3. Situationism
  4. Altruism
  5. Egoism
  6. Teleologism
  7. Deontologism
  8. Utilitarianism

- What do we mean by the term moral dilemma? Give your own example.

## 7.0 References/Further Readings


Agulanna, C. O. (2011) *Moral Theories and Ethical Principles*. Lecture delivered at a 2 Day Course in Medical Ethics Organized by West African College of Physicians 28th- 29th July.

Ciciloni, Ferdinando. 1825. *A Grammar of the Italian Language*. London: John Murray.

Hull, R.T. 1979. The Variety of Ethical Theories, Given at Buffalo Psychiatric Centre, March 27.

Kraut, Richard. 2018. Altruism. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Edward N. Zalta. Eds. Retrieved from https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/altruism/.

Lawhead, W. F. 2002 The Voyage of Discovery, A Historical Introduction to Philosophy, 2nd ed., U.S.A. Wadsworth Group.

Roger Crisp. ed. 1997. Mill on Utilitarianism. New York: Routlegde.

Popkin, R. H and Stroll, A. 1969. *Philosophy Made Simple*. London: W. H Allen.

Reath, A. 2006. Kant's Critical Account of Freedom. Graham Bird. ed. *A Companion to Kant*. USA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.



Roger Crisp. ed. 1997. Mill on Utilitarianism. New York: Routlegde.

Stuart C. Gilman. 2005. *Ethics codes and codes of conduct as tools for promoting an ethical and professional public service: Comparative Successes and Lessons.* Prepared for the PREM, the World Bank Washington, DC.

Uduigwomen, A. F. 2006. Introducing Ethics: Trends, Problems & Perspectives. Calabar: Jochrisam Publishers.

Zaine Ridling. 2001. Philosophy Then and Now: A Look Back at 26 Centuries of Thought. *Access Foundation*.

## UNIT 4: METAPHYSICS

### Contents



### 1.0 Introduction

Welcome to the discussion of our last unit for this module which is on Metaphysics. We shall examine this topic by looking at the definition and divisions of Metaphysics as well as some problems in Metaphysics, such as the problem of universals and particulars, the problem of the existence of God, the problem of evil and the mind-body problem. Philosophers generally disagree about the nature of metaphysics but this does not mean that the concept itself is completely elusive. Aristotle and the medieval philosophers have given different opinions about what metaphysics is all about. They have opined that it is the attempt to identify the first causes, in particular, God or the Unmoved Mover and also, they conceive of it as the very general science of being *qua* being.[1]

The term 'metaphysics' derives from the Greek word *meta-physika*, meaning the work after physics, that is to say, the works after those that concern natural things. Apparently, Andronicus of Rhodes who edited Aristotle's work gave this name to one of the books in the collection of the writings of Aristotle, a book that is a broad research into the more general categories of being. It seemed that Andronicus named this book the 'metaphysics' just because he made it the next volume after the physics. However, the subsequent mistranslation of the Greek prefix *meta,* which means 'transcending' or 'beyond' promoted the misconception that metaphysics is the study of the supernatural.[221]

[221] Hoffman, Joshua & Rosenkrantz Gary S. 2011. *Historical Dictionary of Metaphysics.* Lanham: The Scarecrow Press Inc. p. 1

Basically, metaphysics is what Aristotle described as the 'first philosophy' or 'first science', a comprehensive inquiry into the ultimate nature of reality. As such, metaphysics consist of a systematic study of the more general categories of being, and of the more general ways of relating entities.

## 2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

By the end of this unit, you would be able to;

- Define Metaphysics
- Explain the divisions of metaphysics
- List and respond to some of the problems of metaphysics

## 3.0 Main Content

## 3.1 Definition of Metaphysics

Metaphysics is a branch of philosophy that deals with fundamental questions about the nature of reality. The etymological definition of metaphysics holds that the term metaphysics is derived from the Greek words *meta-physika,* meaning after physics or transcending the physical.[222] Among philosophers, from Descartes onwards, the term metaphysical has come to have the distinct sense of having to do with what lies beyond what is visibly available to the senses. In its simplest form, metaphysics represents a science that seeks ultimate knowledge of reality which broadly comprises ontology and cosmology. Metaphysics as is generally understood, therefore furnishes us with knowledge of reality transcending the world of science, common sense or the phenomenal world.

## 3.2 Divisions of Metaphysics

### 3.2.1 Ontology

Metaphysics, as have been roughly analysed, can be described as the science and study of the first cause or ultimate cause and of the first and most universal principle of reality. Metaphysics includes ontology, the science of being, concerned with the general categorisation of what exists and of what could exist. It is the study of what kinds of things exist and what entities there are in the universe. Ontology is the study of 'being', as it has been understood from the time of Parmenides, Plato, Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas up to the present.[223] Ontology being a division of metaphysics, can be regarded as a speculative philosophy which investigates the nature of human existence, causality,

---

[222] Kim, J. and E. Sosa. eds. 1995. *A Companion to Metaphysics*. London: Blackwell Publishers.
[223] Alvira Tomas, Clavell Luis, Melendo Tomas. 1982. *Metaphysics*. Manila: Sinag-Tala Publishers, Inc. p. xi

the notion of God and a number of other subject matter which call for introspection and analysis. Metaphysics which is the most general of all disciplines aims to identify the nature and structure of all that there is, and central to this project is the delineation of the categories of being.[224] Ontology does not just examine the essential classes of being and how they identify with each other, it is concerned about we come to know whether classifications of being are basic and talks about what sense the things in those classes might be said to exist. It is the investigation into being in so much as it is being, that is 'being qua being', or into beings to the extent that they exist.

The word 'is' has two different uses in English, differentiated in ontology. It can mean existence as in 'there is an elephant in the room'. It can also signify the possession of a property by an object as in 'the elephant is grey' i.e. the elephant has grayness. A few rationalists likewise incorporate sub-classing as a third form of 'is-ness' or being, as in 'the elephant is a mammal'. Ontology gives a record of which words allude to entities, which do not, why, and what classes result.[225]

### 3.2.2 Cosmology

Cosmogony deals specifically with the origin of the universe while cosmology is the study of the universe as well as the material structure and laws governing the universe conceived as an ordered set. Cosmology is a division of metaphysics that deals with the world as the totality of all phenomena in space and time. It aims to study the world and to explain it in its totality, a venture which appears unattainable owing to the fact that it is impossible to have experience of all phenomena in their entirety. Historically, it has been shown to have a broad scope which in many cases was traceable to religion. However, in modern times, it addresses questions about the Universe which are beyond the scope of the physical sciences. It is distinguished from religious cosmology in that it approaches these questions using philosophical methods such as dialectics. Cosmology tries to address questions such as; what is the origin of the Universe? What is its first cause? Is its existence necessary? What are the ultimate material components of the Universe? What is the ultimate reason for the existence of the Universe? Does the cosmos have a purpose? Cosmology is the science of reality as an orderly whole, concerned with the general characterization of reality as an ordered, law governed system.[226] As such, ontological and cosmological concerns intertwine. Cosmology seeks to understand the origin and meaning of the universe by thought alone.

---

[224] Loux, Michael. 2006. Metaphysics: A Contemporary Introduction to Philosophy. 3rd ed. London: Routledge Publishers. p. X

[225] Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metaphysics. Retrieved: 23rd August 2019.

[226] Hoffman, Joshua & Rosenkrantz Gary S. 2011. Historical Dictionary of Metaphysics. Lanham: The Scarecrow Press Inc. p. 2

## 3.3 Problems of Metaphysics

### 3.3.1 Problem of Universals and Particulars

This problem originates from a famous passage in Porphyry's 'Introduction to Aristotle's Categories: Isagoge'. The treatise which was translated by Boethius appears at the beginning of the above mentioned work and it raised the following problem: are genera and species real, or are they empty inventions of the intellect?[227]

MacLeod and Rubenstein describe Universals as a class of mind-independent entities, usually contrasted with individuals or particulars, postulated to ground and explain relations of qualitative identity and resemblance among individuals. They stated that individuals are similar in virtue of sharing universals. For example, 'an apple and a ruby are both red, and their common redness results from sharing a universal'. They believe that if they are both red at the same time, then the universal, red, must be in two places at once. They therefore concluded that this makes universals quite different from individuals; and it makes them controversial.[228]

The problem of universals alludes to the issue of whether properties exist, and assuming this is the case, what are they like? Properties are characteristics or relations that at least two elements share for all intents and purpose. The different sorts of properties, for example, qualities and relations, are alluded to as universals. For instance, one can envision three cup holders on a table, that share for all intents and purpose the nature of being round or epitomizing circularity or two girls that share practically speaking, being the female offsprings of Frank. There are numerous such properties, for example, being human, red, male or female, fluid, enormous or little, taller than, father of, and so on. While Philosophers concur that people discuss and think about properties, they differ on whether these universals exist in all actuality or just in the mind.[229]

It is commonly said that all humans are one with regard to their humanity. So defenders of realism conclude that there must be humanity outside of the mind, which exists in the same way in all singular men.[230] Aquinas is of the view that even if a particular individual, Socrates as an example, is a human being and that another individual, Plato as an example, is a human being, it is not necessary that both have numerically the same humanity any more than it is necessary for two white things to have numerically the same whiteness. On the contrary, it is only necessary that the one resemble the other in having an individual humanity just as the other does. It is for this

[227] Raul Corazzon. 2018. Theory and History of Ontology. In The Problem of Universals from Antiquity to the Middle Ages.p.1. https://www.ontology.co/universals-history.htm. Retrieved: 24th August 2019.

[228] MacLeod, M. & Rubenstein, E. (2006). "Universals", The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, J. Fieser & B. Dowden. eds.

[229] Loux, Michael J. 2001. "The Problem of Universals" in Metaphysics: Contemporary Readings, Michael J. Loux. ed. New York: Routledge.p.4

[230] Hans-Ulrich Wöhler (Hrsg.) 1992. Texte zum Universalienstreit. Bd 1. Berlin: Akademie. p.263

reason that the mind, when it considers an individual humanity, not as belonging to this or that individual, but as such forms a concept that is common to them all.[231]

The world seems to contain many individual things, both physical such as tables, books and cars, and abstract such as love, beauty and number. The former objects are called particulars. Particulars are said to have attributes such as size, shape, colour and location, and two particulars may have some such attributes in common. The nature of these attributes and whether they have any real existence, and if so of what kind, is a long-standing metaphysical problem in philosophy. Metaphysicians concerned with questions about universals or particulars are interested in the nature of objects and their properties, and the relationship between the two. Some like Plato, argue that properties are abstract objects, existing outside of space and time, to which particular objects bear special relations. Others maintain that particulars are a bundle or collection of properties.

### 3.3.2 The Problem of the Existence of God

If God is conceived as the Supreme Being, Being Itself, the source and Creator of all beings, then the question of his existence is of great importance. It is indeed paradoxical that there would be a need to prove the existence of this Being of all beings, yet that is precisely the situation philosophers and theologians find themselves in, since God cannot be perceived by human senses. The overall theistic explanation is that God transcends finite forms of being and thus cannot be reached directly by finite human minds, although indirect rational proofs may be possible. The opposite position concludes that God cannot be perceived because he simply does not exist. This leads to the essential question of the meaning of 'existence' as it applies to God.[232]

Anselm's argument for the existence of God is ontological in nature. He believes that the notion of God can be couched in the idea of 'something than which nothing greater can be conceived' because to be greater connotes better perfection. For this reason, 'something than which nothing more perfect can be conceived' has to be more perfect. Also, for the reason that humans have this knowledge, Anselm concludes that, 'something than which nothing greater can be conceived, at least exists in our minds as an object of thought. One may want to ask at this point if this Being also exist in reality? Anselm argues in the affirmative saying that if nothing than which nothing greater can be conceived does not exist in reality, then, we would not be able to conceive it.[233]

Leibniz's argument for God's existence is also ontological in nature. Considering the perfect harmony that exists among substances which do not communicate with each other, for him is a pointer to the fact that a supremely intelligent being must be the cause

[231] Jeffrey E. Brower. 2014. Aquinas's Ontology of the Material World: Change, Hylomorphism, and Material Objects. UK: Oxford University Press. P.22

[232] https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/God,_Arguments_for_the_Existence_of

[233] Wallace I. Matson.1989. The Ontological Argument In J. E. White ed. Introduction to Philosophy. New York: West Pub.

of the harmony. According to Leibniz, "whatever follows from the idea or definition of anything can be predicated of that thing. Since the most perfect being includes all perfection, among which is existence, existence follows from the idea of God…therefore existence can be predicated of God."[23]

### 3.3.3 The Problem of Evil

The existence of evil and suffering in our world seems to pose a serious challenge to belief in the existence of a perfect God. If God were all-knowing, it seems that God would know about all of the horrible things that happen in our world. If God were all-powerful, God would be able to do something about all of the evil and suffering. Furthermore, if God were morally perfect, then surely God would want to do something about it. And yet we find that our world is filled with countless instances of evil and suffering. These facts about evil and suffering seem to conflict with the orthodox theist claim that there exists a perfectly good God. The challenged posed by this apparent conflict has come to be known as the problem of evil.[234]

The meaning of evil extends to all that is bad, harmful or vile. Something is evil if it is likely to cause harm or cause trouble. As such, evil covers something that is not good as it relates particularly to actions, events, thoughts, disposition, and utterances. Evil is that which obstructs the efforts of man to achieve a good and worthwhile existence. With regards to the character of evil, the Manichean view holds that evil is an autonomous power and a reality existing alongside the good. On the other hand, the Augustinian view is that evil is a privation of the good or perfection. In this sense, evil is present when some qualities that a thing should have are lacking in that thing. Thus, evil arises because certain things that are created intrinsically good have become corrupted.

The harmony in the world led Leibniz to opine that God created the best of all possible worlds. He argued that "necessary truths, including modal truths such as; that unicorns are possible, must exist somewhere… [He] located these truths as acts of thought or ideas in the mind of an omniscient, necessarily existent God who contemplates them."[24] In his 'Monadology', Leibniz held that in the ideas of God, there is infinity of possible worlds, and as only one can exist, there must be a sufficient reason which made God to choose one rather than the other. And this reason can be no other than perfection or fitness, derived from the different degrees of perfection which these worlds contain, each possible world having a claim to exist according to the measure of perfection which it enfolds. And this is the cause of the existence of that best, which the wisdom of God discerns, which his goodness chooses, and his power effects.[25]

Nevertheless, if this world which is God's own creation and choice is the best of all possible worlds, then our idea of good and evil becomes questionable. With the

[234] James R. Beebe. Logical Problem of Evil. Retrieved from https://www.iep.utm.edu/ accessed: 25th August 2019.

evidences of evils and catastrophes in the world, it is difficult for anyone to say that this is the best of all possible worlds that a Being, most benevolent can offer. Indeed, for Leibniz, to say that this world is the best of all possible worlds is a confirmation that we do not have a proper idea of good and evil. Evil he said is "a necessary and unavoidable consequence of God's having chosen to create the best of all possible worlds. However bad we might think things are in our world, they would be worse in any other."[26] So, Leibniz is saying that we cannot understand the necessity of what we consider evil if we only look at a particular individual act of evil. This is because some things that appear evil to us sometimes ultimately turn out to be good and that the omniscient God who has made it so has sufficient reasons for making them so.

### 3.3.4 The Mind-Body Problem

The mind-body dualism is a metaphysical problem originating from the view that mental phenomena are, in some respects, non-physical, or that the mind and body are different entities that are separable. Thus, it focuses on a set of views about the relationship between mind and matter, and between subject and object. One of the variants of dualism is substance dualism.

Substance dualism also known as Cartesian dualism is a type of dualism most famously defended by Rene Descartes, which states that there are two kinds of reality; the mental and the physical which corresponds to the mind and the body respectively. Substance dualism affirms an ontological distinction between properties of the mind and the body, and that consciousness is ontologically irreducible to neurobiology and physics. This philosophy states that the mind can exist outside of the body and that it can think, will, opine, reflect and ponder, functions which the body cannot perform. As a philosophical position, substance dualism is compatible with most theologies which claim that immoral souls occupy an independent realm of existence distinct from that of the physical world.[235] It disagrees with the view that matter or the living human bodies can be appropriately organized in a way that would yield mental properties.[236]

The mind-body problem originating from this dualism revolves around the possibility and place of interaction between the mind and body. That minds and bodies interact causally is not easily disputable since our decision to act leads us to move our body in a particular way. The activities in the body result in conscious sensory experiences. When we are hungry and need to get some food from the kitchen, the moment we conceive of the idea of moving to the kitchen in our minds, our body responds in movement. When we have satisfied our hunger, our minds respond as we become happy. However, it is hard to see how such interaction could occur if minds are non-material substances and bodies are material and extended. Descartes is of the opinion that the mind and the body do interact and that man is essentially a thinking being who

[235] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mind%E2%80%93body_dualism. Retrieved 25th August 2019.
[236] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mind%E2%80%93body_dualism. Retrieved 25th August 2019.

possesses a body and that this is the reason we feel pain when we hurt our body. He believes that the mind influences the body and the body also influences the mind, but encountered a problem trying to show where this interaction takes place.

## 4.0 Conclusion

Metaphysics is concerned with explaining the way things 'are' in the world. It is concerned primarily with 'being as being' that is with anything in so far as it exists. However, metaphysics is not concerned with examining the physical properties of things that exist, but is, instead, the study of the underlying principles that give rise to the unified natural world. As such, the problem of evil is a metaphysical one because it deals with the object 'evil' as opposed to 'good' which is a metaphysical subject, whereas the statement that 'all things are composed of atoms, which are in turn composed of electrons, protons, and neutrons' is definitely not metaphysics, but the concern of the physical sciences.

## 5.0 Summary

So far, we have defined metaphysics after Aristotle's description of it as the 'first philosophy' or 'first science', a comprehensive inquiry into the ultimate nature of reality. As such, metaphysics was said to consist of a systematic study of the more general categories of being, and of the more general ways of relating entities. The two divisions of metaphysics as considered were 'Ontology', regarded as a speculative philosophy which investigates the nature of human existence, causality, the notion of God and a number of other subject-matter which call for introspection and analysis, as well as 'cosmology' which deals with the world as the totality of all phenomena in space and time. Some of the problems of metaphysics considered are the Problem of Universals and Particulars, the Problem of the Existence of God, The Problem of Evil and the Mind-Body Problem.

## 6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

- What is Metaphysics?
- List and explain the divisions of metaphysics.
- Briefly explain each of the following problems of metaphysics:

    1. The problem of universals and particulars
    2. The problem of the existence of god
    3. The problem of evil
    4. The mind-body problem

## 7.0 References/Further Readings


Alvira Tomas, Clavell Luis, Melendo Tomas. 1982. *Metaphysics*. Manila: Sinag-Tala Publishers, Inc.

Hans-Ulrich Wöhler (Hrsg.) 1992. *Texte zum Universalienstreit*. Bd 1. Berlin: Akademie.

Hoffman, Joshua & Rosenkrantz Gary S. 2011. *Historical Dictionary of Metaphysics.* Lanham: The Scarecrow Press Inc.

James R. Beebe. *Logical Problem of Evi*l. Retrieved from https://www.iep.utm.edu/ accessed: 25th August 2019.

Jeffrey E. Brower. 2014. *Aquinas's Ontology of the Material World: Change, Hylomorphism, and Material Objects*. UK: Oxford University Press. P.22

Kim, J. and E. Sosa. eds. 1995. *A Companion to Metaphysics*. London: Blackwell Publishers.

Loux, Michael J. 2001. The Problem of Universals. In *Metaphysics: Contemporary Readings*, Michael J. Loux. ed. New York: Routledge.

MacLeod, M. & Rubenstein, E. 2006. *Universals*, The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, J. Fieser & B. Dowden. eds.

Raul Corazzon. 2018. Theory and History of Ontology. In The Problem of Universals from Antiquity to the Middle Ages.p.1. https://www.ontology.co/universals-history.htm. Retrieved: 24th August 2019.

Wallace I. Matson.1989. The Ontological Argument In J. E. White ed. *Introduction to Philosophy*. New York: West Pub.

# MODULE 5: AFRICAN PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITIONS

Unit 1: The Idea of African philosophy
Unit 2: Orientations in African philosophy
Unit 3: Issues in African philosophy
Unit 4: Sub-Disciplinary Focus on African Philosophy

## UNIT 1: THE IDEA OF AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

**Contents**



### 1.0: Introduction

Welcome to this discussion on the idea of African philosophy. In discussing this topic, we shall examine some background information around the debate on whether or not there is African philosophy, after which we shall proceed to examine what African philosophy really is. Philosophy in Africa has had an interesting history and discourse. In the twentieth century, particularly since the end of the Second World War, the question of African philosophy became a major issue in philosophy, especially among the African practitioners of philosophy and many other African scholars. Some of the central questions about African philosophy have revolved around what genuinely constitutes African philosophy. In this unit, we shall take a look at the background to the discourse on African philosophy, and then attempt a concise survey of definitions of African philosophy, all in the effort to attain an understanding of what African philosophy really is.

## 2.0: Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

It is hoped that the student, at the end of this unit, will have a fairly good idea of

- what African philosophy is;
- the background to the discourse on African philosophy;
- certain indices for adjudging a work as not just philosophy but, in specific terms, as African philosophy;
- the meta-philosophical debates as to the existence or character of African philosophy.

## 3.0: Main Content

### 3.1: Background to the Discourse

It is important to realise that the debate on African philosophy was in fact a debate over the very humanity of Africans. Scholars like Peter Bodunrin[237] acknowledge (even if he does not accept) the honorific connotation of philosophy, such that, to have no philosophy is, for all intents and purposes, to be less than human. Many European writers, such as Lucien Levy-Bruhl and E. B. Tylor, have asserted that Africans are 'irrational', 'pre-logical', 'concrete' (as against 'abstract'), and so on. Given the image of philosophy as the very heart of reason, the contributions of reputable western philosophers to charges like these are particularly damaging. David Hume for example, says, "There never was civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent in action or speculation. No ingenious manufacturer among them, no arts, no sciences…."[238] Immanuel Kant throws his weight behind Hume's opinion and also, according to Emmanuel C. Eze[239], gives it a transcendental status. Kant asserts:

> Mr Hume challenges anyone to cite a simple example in which a Negro has shown talents, and asserts that among the hundreds of thousands of blacks who are transported elsewhere from their countries, although many of them have been set free, still not a single one was ever found who presented anything great in art or science or any other praiseworthy quality; even among the whites some continually rise aloft from the lowest rabble, and through superior gifts earn respect in the world. So fundamental is the difference between the two races of man, and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in colour.[240]

---

**[237] See Bodunrin, P. O. 1981. "The question of African philosophy"** ***Philosophy.*** **Vol. 56.**

**[238] quoted in Biakolo, E. 2003. "Categories of cross-cultural cognition and the African condition." P.H. Coetzee and A.P.J. Roux (eds.).** ***The African Philosophy Reader*** **(second edition). London: Routledge. 10.**

**[239] Eze, E. C. 2003. "The colour of reason: The idea of 'race' in Kant's** ***Philosophy Reader*** **anthropology." P.H. Coetzee and A.P.J. Roux (eds.).** ***The African Philosophy Reader*** **(second edition). London: Routledge.**

**[240] Kant, I. 1960.** ***Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime,*** **tr. John T. Goldthwait. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. 110-111.**

He goes on to make many of his own racist remarks, trying to found them on 'sound' philosophical and scientific grounds. According to Eze,

> …some elements in the 'moral geography' taught by Kant included expositions on culture, such as the 'knowledge' that it is customary to permit theft in Africa, or to desert children in China, or to bury them alive in Brazil, or for Eskimos to strangle them. Finally, it is the domain of moral philosophy to show, for example, that such actions, based upon unreflective mores and customs, natural impulses (or 'the inclination to evil'), and/or the 'commands of authority', lack 'ethical principles' and are therefore not properly (i.e. essentially) human. Unreflective mores and customs (such as supposedly practised by the non-European peoples listed by Kant) are devoid of ethical principles because these people lack the capacity for development of 'character', and they lack character presumably because they lack adequate self-consciousness and rational will, for it is self reflectivity (the 'ego concept') and the rational principled will which make the upbuilding of (moral) character possible through the (educational) process of development of goodness latent in/as human nature.[241]

Kant says of Africans in particular:

> The race of the Negroes, one could say, is completely the opposite of the Americans; they are full of affect and passion, very lively, talkative and vain. They can be educated but only as servants (slaves), that is they allow themselves to be trained. They have many motivating forces, are also sensitive, are afraid of blows and do much out of a sense of honour.[242]

Here, we see a suggestion not only that non-white people are sub-human, but also a justification for any treatment applied to them by the whites.

This dubious attempt at providing a philosophical rationalization of racism and oppression reached its apogee in G. W. F. Hegel's *The Philosophy of History*. Hegel divides Africa into three regions and identifies sub-Saharan Africa as 'Africa proper'. Then he says:

> Africa proper, as far as History goes back, has remained — for all purposes of connection with the rest of the World — shut up; …— the land of childhood, which lying beyond the

[241] **Eze, 2003. 512.**
[242] **Kant, 1831. 353.**

> day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night. …
> The peculiarly African character is difficult to comprehend, for the very reason that in reference to it, we must quite give up the principle which naturally accompanies all *our* ideas — the category of Universality.… (The) distinction between himself as an individual and the universality of his essential being, the African in the uniform, undeveloped oneness of his existence has not yet attained; so that the Knowledge of an absolute Being… is entirely wanting. The Negro… exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality — all that we call feeling — if we would rightly comprehend him; there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character.[243]

It is against this kind of presumption that African scholars reacted by presenting what they regard as African philosophy. Perhaps, the remarks made by Barry Hallen at the beginning of his book, *A Short History of African Philosophy* (2002), will help explicate the contention over African philosophy since the twentieth century:

> The characterization of Africa's pre-colonial indigenous cultures as significantly ahistorical in character has been dismissed as patently false. The significance of the word "primitive," as originally used by *non*-Africans to type Africa's cultures, was that those cultures could serve as contemporary exemplars of how human beings had lived in primeval and pristine times, "before" recorded history.
> This false ahistorical stereotype had profound consequences for Africa's status vis-à-vis philosophy as an international enterprise. "Early" human societies anywhere in the world were not thought to have developed the capacity for the intellectual reflection definitive of this supposedly sophisticated discipline. Therefore Africa's indigenous cultures were, in both principle and fact, disqualified from occupying a place in the philosophical arena.
> The response on the part of many African philosophers, scholars, and intellectuals to this falsely a-historical, as well as deeply offensive, typing of the cognitive significance of their civilizations has been sustained and vigorous. The fact that these efforts have only recently begun to have recognizable consequences in and on the Western academy

[243] **Hegel, G. W. F. 2001. *The Philosophy of History.* Tr. J. Sibree. Kitchener: Batoche Books.109-111**

> would probably be cited by those same individuals as further evidence of how profound the influence of this demeaning caricature of Africa's cultures was on the rest of the world and, in some cases, on Africans themselves.[244]

Commenting on the history of African philosophy in the twentieth century as well as the ideological presumptions against which it had to struggle, V. Y. Mudimbe also says:

> At the beginning of the century one comes across expressions such as "primitive philosophy" or "philosophy of the savages" in most ethnographic and anthropological texts which refer to what nowadays is commonly called local or indigenous systems of thought. Today it is clear that the scientific discourse on Africa was then made up of ideological preconceptions and philosophical speculation on the chain of beings and its history, unproven evolutionary assumptions about cultures and human beings, and, finally, political considerations grounding the right to colonize.[245]

The point, then, is this: if philosophy is the index of rationality, and rationality or reason is the hallmark of humanity – the very factor that differentiates it from lower animals – then the charge that Africans have no philosophy is tantamount to asserting that Africans are, in fact, no more than mere beasts. And if that is the case, the theoretical justification for their enslavement, colonization and exploitation is thus established. It is therefore understandable – indeed, inevitable – that Africans would react, not only by arguing that Africans are capable of the kind of rational activity that is regarded as philosophical, but also by showing or demonstrating that Africans have had a philosophy before their contact with the West. Some African scholars would, in fact, also insist on Africa's prerogative to decide for itself what its intellectual programme should be (and, by implication, what it considers as philosophy). Complaining against the West's presumption to dictate what an African intellectual programme should be, Mogobe Ramose says:

> The term 'African philosophy'… tends to revive innate scepticism on the one hand, and to stimulate ingrained condescension on the other. The sceptic, unswervingly committed to the will to remain ignorant, is simply dismissive of any possibility, let alone the probability, of African philosophy. ...In these circumstances, the right to knowledge

[244] Hallen, B. 2002. *A short history of African philosophy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 3.

**[245] Mudimbe, V. Y. 1986. "On the Question of an African Philosophy: The Case of French-Speaking Africa" Mowoe, Isaac James and Bjornson (eds.), Richard, *Africa and the West: Legacies of an Empire*, New York: Greenwood Press. 88.**

> in relation to the African is measured and determined by passive as well as uncritical assimilation, coupled with faithful implementation of knowledge defined and produced from outside Africa.[246]

Ramose says further:

> The question whether or not African philosophy is possible or exists continues to be debated…. The question pertains more to the capability of the African to philosophize…. This is because by their nature…, it is impossible for Africans to do philosophy. In this way, the question assumes an ontological character: it calls into question the humanity of the African. The question is thus another way of saying that it is doubtful if Africans are wholly and truly human beings.
> …Thus in the name of science many spurious excuses were found as to why there could not be and never was an African philosophy. African historical reconstruction is a response and a challenge to this tradition.[247]

African philosophy today might be regarded as largely an outcome of the reactions mentioned above.

### 3.2: What is African Philosophy?

For a number of reasons, African philosophy is difficult to define. For one thing, it inherits the intractable problem of definition that philosophy itself has. Besides, the 'African' denotation of a philosophy creates further complications, since philosophy, to a considerable extent, is perceived to be universal, dealing with the most general questions. It is in this regard that Bruce B. Janz points out:

> More so than other philosophical traditions, African philosophy struggles with a central tension within its very name. On the one hand, philosophy has tended to contemplate universals, regarding them either as the foundation or beginning point of thought or as the goal of thought, and seeing them as a non-negotiable requirement of philosophy...; on the other, the term 'African' designates a particularity.[248]

Even though most African scholars – whether philosophers or otherwise – reject the characterization of Africans as sub-human, there is (or was for a number of decades) a

---

[246] Ramose, M. 2003. "The struggle for reason in Africa" P.H. Coetzee and A.P.J. Roux (eds.). *The African Philosophy Reader* (second edition). London: Routledge. 2

**[247] Ibid. 4-5.**

**[248] Janz, B. B. 2007. "African Philosophy". Boundas, C. (ed.). *Companion to 20th Century Philosophy,* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 690.**

debate over African philosophy among African intellectuals. While some believe that African philosophy is, in fact, just starting with the emergence of a crop of Africans trained in Western philosophy,[249] some others believe that African philosophy has always existed as long as Africans have been able to reason. For the former group, the content and methodology of African philosophy is the same as that of Western philosophy, with the only difference that it is being practised either by Africans or in Africa. The latter group, however, holds that African philosophy is as old as when Africans began to reflect on fundamental issues around them, and that traditional African philosophy is to be found in the oral traditions of Africa, without recourse to Western methodologies and procedures. Yet, there is an intermediate group that believes in the canons of Western philosophy but reckon that traditional Africa does supply the material for philosophical activity in the formal sense. Among the first group (the professionals) is Henry Odera Oruka who contends that:

> The attempt to state what African philosophy is may be an attempt to give an answer to a question that either has no answer, or that it is still too early for it to need an answer. It may be also that the question "What is African philosophy?" is nonsensical verbiage like the question: "What is African death?"[250]

Oruka seems to imply here that there is no African philosophy because philosophy is the same everywhere, just as death is the same everywhere. However, it is obvious that he not only acknowledges Western philosophy but also accepts it as the Philosophy, the paradigm of what philosophy in the ideal sense is. And this becomes particularly uncomfortable if we consider Ramose's contention that it amounts to condescension to have African philosophy, as well as its content or methodology, defined only in terms of how similar it is to Western philosophy.

Oruka accuses the second group (the traditionalists) of trying to eject critical reasoning as a basic trait of philosophy, saying:

> Some wish to deny critical rationality, at least as it is understood in the West, to African philosophy, claiming indeed that it is precisely lack of critical reasoning that helps to distinguish African philosophy from Western philosophy. Yet others think that philosophy, whether African or not, is

**[249] Bodunrin, 1981. 162.**

**[250] Oruka, H. O. 1975. "The Fundamental Principles in the Question of African Philosophy", *Second Order*, Vol. IV, No. 1, (January, 1975). 44.**

> not worth the name if rationality and logicality are ejected from it.[251]

This accusation by Oruka, upon close scrutiny, is quite problematic and inaccurate. While some works in traditional African philosophy are merely descriptive, many are thoroughly critical. But even among those considered to be no more than descriptive, it is doubtful if there is any among them that claims that irrationality is the very soul of African philosophy. On the contrary, the major purpose of their work is to prove that traditional Africans were just as rational as Euro-Americans.

Of more constructive import, however, is Oruka's position that whatever is the difference between African philosophy and Western philosophy, "it does not qualitatively lie in the use of reason. Reason is a universal human trait. And the greatest disservice to African philosophy is to deny it reason and dress it in magic and extra-rational traditionalism".[252]

**Although there are disputes as to what constitutes African philosophy, there is, however, a consensus among scholars that there is an African philosophy. But what, in general terms, is African philosophy?**
***African philosophy* can be seen, depending on which approach we choose to follow, as an attempt to understand reality from an African perspective; or, as an attempt to understand the African reality from a philosophical perspective. According to Kwasi Wiredu, a foremost African philosopher,**

> **By definition, the fundamental concepts of philosophy are the most fundamental categories of human thought. But the particular modes of thought that yield these concepts may reflect the specifics of the culture, environment and even the accidental idiosyncrasies of the people concerned.[253]**

**For John S. Mbiti, African philosophy "refers to the understanding, attitude of mind, logic and perception behind the manner in which Africans think, act or speak in different situations of life.[254] This understanding of African philosophy suggests a traditional (or ethnophilosophical) approach to the subject, as emphasis on criticism seems to be lacking. But to paraphrase A. G. A. Bello, if philosophy, according to Staniland, is "the criticism of the ideas that we live by," then it goes without saying**

---

[251] quoted in Gyekye, K. 1997. *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*. New York: Oxford University Press. 29.
[252] Ibid.
[253] Wiredu, K. 1995 "Conceptual Decolonisation in African philosophy." Selected and introduced by O. Oladipo. Ibadan: Hope Publications. 23.
[254] Mbiti, J. S. 1969. *African Religions and Philosophy*. London: Heinemann. 2.

**that African philosophy should be concerned with the criticism of the ideas that Africans live by.[255]**

**Gbadegesin's view of African philosophy can be considered quite suitable here: it is quite expressive as it covers the very basic, fundamental elements which should define African philosophy. He says:**

> …African philosophy is first and foremost a philosophical activity and is addressed to issues relating to African realities – traditional or contemporary. By the latter, I mean that it satisfies any or all of the following:
>
> (i) it focuses on African conceptual systems,
> (ii) it deals with problems and issues African in nature,
> (iii) it is based on contemporary African experience,
> (iv) it is a comparative study and analysis of African realities vis-à-vis other regions of the world.[256]

African philosophy may be defined, ultimately, as the philosophical reflections, either of Africans, or on the African experience. And this would align with the position of P. O. Bodunrin, who declares that African philosophy is simply the philosophical activity of Africans,[257] with that of K. C. Anyanwu, who holds that African philosophy should be essentially a "reflection on the African cultural experience, or the exposition of the basic assumptions, concepts and theories which underline African cultural experience and activities."[258]

## 4.0: Conclusion

African philosophy today is a product of what Mogobe Ramose calls "the struggle for reason in Africa."[259] It is an attempt by Africans (and some non-Africans) to uphold what is at stake here: the rationality of Africans. And even though there are differences, sometimes significant, in approaches to African philosophy, scholars are generally agreed that there is an African philosophy which implies, in turn, that Africans are not by nature irrational. And so, this unit has highlighted some aspects of this 'struggle'; the reason for the reaction that has given rise to African philosophy as a conscious, academic exercise and the debate over the nature and content of African philosophy. In all, we have attempted to understand what African philosophy is in basic terms: as the philosophical reflection on Africa or by Africans.

## 5.0: Summary

---

**[255] Bello, A. G. A. 2004. "Some methodological controversies in African philosophy." K. Wiredu, (ed.). *A Companion to African Philosophy.* Malden: Blackwell Publishing. 264.**

[256] Gbadegesin, S. 1991. *African Philosophy: Traditional Yoruba Philosophy and Contemporary African Realities*. New York: Peter Lang. 22.

**[257] Bodunrin, 1981. 162.**

[258] Anyanwu, K. C. 1983. *The African Experience in the American Market-Place*. New York: Exposition Press. 42.

**[259] Ramose, 2003. 1.**

Contemporary African philosophy is a reaction to European prejudice that characterises the African as sub-human and therefore incapable of philosophy, which is supposed to be the very index of reasoning (a trait considered to be exclusive only to humans). Some of those derogatory statements have been highlighted in this unit, especially those by the philosophers Hume, Kant and Hegel. We have seen how African philosophy constitutes a response to these charges and an attempt to emphasise African humanity. In trying to understand what African philosophy is, the unit examined the universalist (as against the particularist) approach to philosophy. Having attended to all these, the unit ended with definitions of African philosophy as well as some basic characteristic traits of African philosophy.

**6.0: Self-Assessment Exercise**

i. To what extent do you agree with scholars like Lucien Levy-Bruhl, E. B. Tylor, and David Hume that Africans are 'irrational' and 'pre-logical' and are therefore incapable of philosophy?
ii. How would you define African Philosophy?

**7.0: References/Further Reading**


Anyanwu, K. C. (1983) *The African Experience in the American Market-Place*. New York: Exposition Press.

Bello, A. G. A. (2004) "Some methodological controversies in African philosophy." K. Wiredu, (ed.). *A Companion to African Philosophy*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing.

Biakolo, E. (2003) "Categories of cross-cultural cognition and the African condition." P.H. Coetzee and A.P.J. Roux (eds.). *The African Philosophy Reader* (second edition). London: Routledge.

Bodunrin, P. (1981) "The question of African philosophy." *Philosophy.* Vol. 56.

Eze, E. C. (2003) "The colour of reason: The idea of 'race' in Kant's *Philosophy Reader* anthropology." P.H. Coetzee and A.P.J. Roux (eds.). *The African Philosophy Reader* (second edition). London: Routledge.

Gbadegesin, S. (1991) *African Philosophy: Traditional Yoruba Philosophy and Contemporary African Realities*. New York: Peter Lang.

Gyekye, K. (1997) *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hallen, B. (2002) *A short history of African philosophy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Hegel, G. W. F. (2001) *The Philosophy of History.* Tr. J. Sibree. Kitchener: Batoche Books.

Janz, B. B. (2007) "African Philosophy". Boundas, C. (ed.). *Companion to 20th Century Philosophy,* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Kant, I. (1960) *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime,* tr. John T. Goldthwait. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
Mbiti, J. S. (1969) *African Religions and Philosophy*. London: Heinemann
Mudimbe, V. Y. (1986) "On the Question of an African Philosophy: The Case of French-Speaking Africa" Mowoe, Isaac James and Bjornson (eds.), Richard, *Africa and the West: Legacies of an Empire*, New York: Greenwood Press.
Oladipo, Olusegun 2006. "Issues in the Definition of African Philosophy." Oladipo, Olusegun (ed.). *Core Issues in African philosophy,* Ibadan: Hope Publications. Pp. 9-20.
Oruka, H. O. 1975. "The Fundamental Principles in the Question of African Philosophy", *Second Order*, Vol. IV, No. 1, (January, 1975).
Ramose, M. 2003. "The struggle for reason in Africa" P.H. Coetzee and A.P.J. Roux (eds.). *The African Philosophy Reader* (second edition). London: Routledge. 1-9.

Tempels, P. 1959. *Bantu philosophy*. Paris: Presence Africaine.
Wiredu, K. 1995 "Conceptual Decolonisation in African philosophy." Selected and introduced by Olusegun Oladipo. Ibadan: Hope Publications.

Wiredu, K. 2004. "Introduction: African philosophy in our time" Wiredu, K. (ed.). *A Companion to African Philosophy.* Malden: Blackwell Publishing.

## UNIT 2: ORIENTATIONS IN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

**Contents**



### 1.0: Introduction

Welcome to this discussion on orientations in African philosophy. We shall examine the contents of this topic under four (4) main sub-headings which are: Ethno-philosophy, Philosophic Sagacity, Nationalist-Ideological Philosophy and Professional Philosophy. The definition, methodology and content of African philosophy is, to a considerable extent, according to how it is understood by different scholars. These scholars are, in turn, constituted into different schools (or, more precisely, orientations) on the basis of the similarities of their positions, in broad strokes. In this unit, therefore, we shall be considering the four orientations in African philosophy according to the most popular classification.

### 2.0: Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

At the end of this unit, the student should:

- be familiar with the four major orientations in African philosophy as classified by Odera Oruka;
- be able to understand the strengths and weaknesses of each orientation.
- know how an understanding of what African philosophy is derived largely from the perspective of the orientation one is coming from.

### 3.0: Main Content: Orientations in African Philosophy

The question of the existence or nature of African philosophy is also implicated in the trends or orientations in African philosophy. For, to a considerable extent, these trends or schools are divided according to their understanding of what African philosophy should be. According to Bruce B. Janz, “The central concern of African philosophy in the twentieth century, often to the frustration of its practitioners, is over the existence and

nature of African philosophy."[260] This is especially obvious in the dispute between 'professional philosophers' and those who practice what they have designated as 'ethno-philosophy'. As to this dispute about what African philosophy is, Janz says:

> African philosophy's development in the twentieth century is both relatively recent, traceable to some seminal texts, and ancient, drawing on cultural forms that stretch back in time and space. This seeming contradiction can be understood if we realize that philosophy itself is ambiguous. It designates on one hand a set of reflective practices rooted in culture and reason, which rigorously and critically explicate a life-world, and on the other a discipline in the university, with a set of codes, standards, recognised practitioners, and customs.[261]

Although there are shades of opinion on the subject, the prevailing position is that there are four main approaches to African philosophy. This position was popularised by Henry Odera Oruka (1978) and it identifies the trends as ethno-philosophy, philosophic sagacity, nationalist-ideological philosophy, and professional philosophy.

**3.1: Ethno-philosophy**: This refers to the position that the traditional practices, proverbs, belief systems, folklores and other related things in Africa constitute the content, or at least the basic material, for authentic African philosophy. According to Segun Gbadegesin,

> In this sense, it is the philosophy indigenous to Africans untainted by foreign ideas. To attain a deep understanding of this philosophy, then, one needs to go to the roots in the traditions of the people without the mediating influence of the westernised folks.[262]

The term **'Ethno-philosophy' was coined by Paulin Hountondji (1976) to describe the work of those who researched into the thoughts and practices of traditional Africa and described their work as philosophy. And it is to Hountondji that ethno-philosophy owes its pejorative connotation and the negative characterisation it has had, especially among francophone African scholars.[263] For Oruka, Hountondji and Bodunrin, ethno-philosophy is only philosophy in a debased sense since, according to them, what ethno-philosophers try to do is to describe a world outlook or thought system of a particular African community, or the whole of Africa. This is a position that is opposed to seeing philosophy as a body of logically-argued thoughts of individuals.**

---

**[260] Janz, B. B. 2007. "African Philosophy". Boundas, C. (ed.). *Companion to 20th Century Philosophy,* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 690.**

**[261] Ibid. 689.**

**[262] Gbadegesin, 1991. 1.**

**[263] Wiredu, K. 2004. "Introduction: African philosophy in our time" Wiredu, K. (ed.). *A Companion to African Philosophy.* Malden: Blackwell Publishing. 3.**

**Ethno-philosophy is best appreciated in the context that it constitutes a first line of defence against the Eurocentric charge that Africans are intellectually inferior and therefore have no philosophy. It is t**o this effect that such African scholars as Leopold Sedar Senghor, Bolaji Idowu, Alexis Kagame, K. C. Anyanwu and John S. Mbiti wrote in defence of the dignity of the African. One might consider as an exception in this regard, the writer who is commonly identified as the pioneer of ethno-philosophy, Placide Tempels, a European missionary working in Africa, who, as already pointed out, was writing for a European audience and essentially advocating that his compatriots take time to understand the thinking that underlies African values and practices.[264]
Practitioners of ethno-philosophy assert that African philosophy is basically the reflection of philosophers on the African reality. According to K. C. Anyanwu, a vigorous defender of this position, African philosophy should be essentially a "reflection on the African cultural experience, or the exposition of the basic assumptions, concepts and theories which underline African cultural experience and activities."[265]
A major critique of ethno-philosophy is that it represents a communal position. According to critics, mainly of the professional orientation, there is no 'communal consciousness' as such. A position, to be philosophical, has to be individual or personal.[266] A community is a collection of individuals with individual minds, thoughts and reason. If an idea therefore leads to a communal practice, that in no way implies a communal origin. It is in fact impossible to have an idea or practice that does not owe its origin to an individual. But if its adoption by a community robs it of its philosophical status, then same can be said of the ideas of thinkers like John Locke whose socio-political doctrine functions today as the foundation of Western democracy. Gbadegesin says in this regard:

> Of course, there is no communal thought in the sense of a group mind because there is no group with a single mind. But from this it does not follow that we cannot talk intelligently of the cultural beliefs and values of a people, arising from their common reflections on their common experience.[267]

Other critiques of ethno-philosophy include the charge that it is uncritical (that it merely describes traditional African practices and thoughts); that it is unsystematic (it does not follow standard philosophical procedures); and that it is based on unwritten African traditions – and therefore difficult to track and engage directly. About the charge that African traditional thought is uncritical (or 'insufficiently critical') or anything but perfect, Kwasi Wiredu has this to says:

> My main unhappiness with the traditionalist approach derives from its insufficiently critical stance. Just as there was an element of implied evaluation in the accounts of African

[264] See Tempels, P. 1959. *Bantu philosophy*. Paris: Presence Africaine. 13-17.
[265] **Anyanwu, 1983. 42.**
[266] **See, for example, Bodunrin, 1981. 171.**
[267] **Gbadegesin, S. 8.**

> thought offered by the anthropologists and specialists in religion, there is an evaluation implicit in traditionalist accounts. The difference is only that whereas in the former case, particularly, where the authors concerned were Western scholars, the evaluations tended, by and large, to be negative, in the latter, they have uniformly tended to be positive. In itself, that is no problem. But there are, among traditionalists, as hinted above, clear indications of impatience with any suggestion, on the part of an African philosopher, that philosophical fallibility might possibly be encountered in the thought of our ancestors or that there might be some aspect of an African culture that could be less than ideal from a philosophical point of view.[268]

Gbadegesin puts his critique thus:

> If ethno-philosophy is mistaken, therefore, it is in two ways: First, it mostly describes without criticising and this does not do justice to the conceptual schemes it elaborates. Second, by assuming that authentic African philosophy can only be the traditional worldviews of the people, or nothing, it presents a narrow view of African philosophy.[269]

**3.2: Philosophic sagacity**: What Oruka calls 'philosophic-sagacity' rests on the view that philosophy resides in the minds of individuals. This trend in African philosophy is essentially an offshoot of ethno-philosophy, a response to the professional philosophers' charge that ethno-philosophy is not philosophy in the proper sense of the word because it is not the product of an individual mind or effort. It is in this regard that some Western-trained philosophers made the effort to identify specific individuals in traditional African societies who, uninfluenced by Western thoughts, either had a good grasp of their community's ethos and their undergirding rationale, or who had original thoughts that could be regarded as philosophical. Specific mention is here made of the works of Barry Hallen and J. Olubi Sodipo, as well as Henry Odera Oruka. The former worked together with Yoruba medicine men and other 'experts' in Nigeria in order to elucidate the original Yoruba thought on truth and morality[270], while the latter worked with particular individuals in Kenya to ascertain their specific personal thoughts which sometimes stood at variance with their community's positions.[271]

The argument is that, in Africa, there are many critical independent thinkers who guide their thoughts and judgments by the power of reason and in-born insight rather than by authority or communal consensus; and that there are men and women uninfluenced by Western thoughts who are capable of critical and dialectical inquiries. An example is

---

**[268] Wiredu, 2004. 4.**

**[269] Gbadegesin, 1991. 15**

[270] The result of this effort is published in Hallen, B. and Sodipo, J. O. *Knowledge, Belief, and Witchcraft: Analytic Experiments in African Philosophy* (1997).

**[271] Bodunrin, 1981. 167-168.**

Marcel Griaule's "Conversations with Ogotommelli" published in *An Introduction to Dogon Religious Ideas*. Ogotommelli, an indigenous African, is seen with evident philosophic sagacity in the exposition of the secret doctrines of his community.

Efforts are made in philosophic sagacity to ensure that those objections that have been raised against ethno-philosophy are corrected. Thus, it is identified as the work of an individual, and it is being set down in writing. Besides, the professional philosophers endeavour to ensure that it is critical and expressed in a systematic manner.

As an objection to philosophic sagacity, P. O. Bodunrin has pointed out that it is difficult to properly identify the actual author of the resultant work – between the original sage and the trained philosopher who has assisted him to elucidate his thoughts,[272] or between the individual sage and the society whose ideas he tries to expound.[273] Apart from this, whether the work be identified as that of the traditional sage or that of the professional philosopher, it would qualify as African philosophy simply because it is a work of philosophy which happens to be done by an African or a scholar working in Africa.[274]

**3.3: Nationalist-ideological philosophy**: This is basically political philosophy as found in the ideas and discourses related to the African anti-colonial struggle for liberation. The orientation grew out of the need for the emerging class of political leaders in Africa to give a theoretical or philosophical grounding to their ideas, a grounding that, for most of them, was to be found in traditional African ideas about social and political realities. Thus the nationalist worldview derives from the political reactions of African intellectuals to the imperial domination of Africa. These include the works of leaders like Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Leopold Senghor and others. Their purpose was to show that Africans had their forms of government before the European conquest. According to Bodunrin,

> It is an attempt to evolve a new and, if possible, unique political theory based on traditional African socialism and familyhood. It is argued that a true and meaningful freedom must be accompanied by a true mental liberation and a return, whenever possible and desirable, to genuine and authentic traditional African humanism.[275]

The *raison d'etre* for this need to ground the political thought on traditional African models stems from the fact that the foreign models were failing in several parts of Africa, besides the feeling that political independence ought to be accompanied by intellectual independence.

Two important questions should be asked concerning this approach to African philosophy. The first concerns the rigour and effectiveness of tradition African political

[272] **Ibid. 168.**
[273] **Ibid. 168.**
[274] **Ibid.**
[275] **Ibid. 162.**

systems: how philosophically coherent were they, and how effective were they in the running of tradition African society? There is a popular tendency to be romantic about the African past. But we must ask whether they were, in themselves, flawless. If they were, how come Africans were easily dominated by only a handful of foreigners? The second question is this: even if they were good and effective for the traditional African society, how fitting are they for the African society today?

That the first three trends articulated by Bodunrin and Oruka exist side by side is indubitable, and this is particularly seen in the fact that they obviously aim to produce a philosophy that is distinctly African.

**3.4: Professional philosophy**: This has to do with the insistence on the central importance of critical rationality in the activity of philosophy. This orientation habours scholars who see philosophy as a universal discipline with no cultural colouration. Philosophers of this orientation argue that philosophy, in its strict sense, is being practised in Africa only by professional, Western-trained philosophers because, for them, all the other orientations do not qualify as genuine philosophy. Olusegun Oladipo describes them thus:

> According to those who hold this (predominantly Western) view – P. O. Bodunrin, Paulin Hountondji and, to some degree, Kwasi Wiredu – philosophy is a theoretical discipline like physics, mathematics, linguistics and so on. It is universal in character, has a methodology which makes it possible for us to distinguish it from other disciplines, say, anthropology, literary criticism and political science, and even some central problems or questions in terms of which its primary preoccupations can be characterised.[276]

Members of this school posit that what is needed for a work to qualify as African philosophy is for it to be the philosophy in the proper sense, and the product of an African intellectual. In this regard, Bodunrin (who regards his position as representing those of other members of the school[277]) asserts that,

> African philosophy is the philosophy done by African philosophers whether it be in the area of logic, ethics or history of philosophy… thus if African philosophers were to engage in debates on Plato's epistemology, or on theoretical entities, their work would qualify as African philosophy.[278]

In the same vein, Henry Odera Oruka says,

---

[276] **Oladipo, O. 2000. *The idea of African philosophy.* Ibadan: Hope Publications.17.**

[277] **Bodunrin, 1981. 162.**

[278] **Ibid.**

> …every work that claims to be philosophy is a philosophy only if the contents and the methodology of its inquiry conform to the conception that philosophy is a logical argument, a critical inquiry, a rational speculation or else a synthesis based on a rigorously reasoned-out investigation.[279]

Scholars in this orientation reject ethno-philosophy. For them,

> philosophy must have the same meaning in all cultures, although the subjects that receive priority and perhaps the method of dealing with them may be dictated by cultural biases and the existential situation in the society within which the philosopher operates.[280]

This orientation in African philosophy obviously has more loyalty to discipline than to culture,[281] with the implication that it lacks an African content or colouration, and can therefore not be distinguished from any other kind of philosophy, except by searching out the identity of its practitioner. This approach, according to Bruce Janz, constitutes the "pursuit of a pure disciplinary definition of African philosophy that fails to recognize linkages, debts, dynamic movement, and the history of discipline development (which) is too restrictive."[282] As A. G. A. Bello further says,

> to admit all manner of discussions, for example, of logic and ontology, Greek science and religion, the bundle theory of substance, the a-logicality of immortality, modal metalogic, or theoretical identities (as suggested by, for instance, Bodunrin 1981), into African philosophy will be to miss the point about the "ideological" and existential necessity of cultivating African philosophy. This is especially because these latter theories, topics, or problems belong to another philosophical tradition, to wit, the philosophical tradition of our erstwhile colonizers.[283]

More importantly, besides the assertion that African philosophy is simply philosophy as practised by Africans, much of professional African philosophy seems to have been negative, committed largely to pointing out what African philosophy is not.

While it is true that a philosophical problem should have universal relevance, it is equally true that a local or context-based colouration of the same philosophical problem in no

---

**[279] Oruka, H. O. "The Fundamental Principles in the Question of African Philosophy", *Second Order*, Vol. IV, No. 1, (January, 1975). 5.**
**[280] Bodunrin, 1981. 162.**
**[281] Oladipo, O. *Philosophy and social reconstruction in Africa*. 2009. Ibadan: Hope Publications Ltd. xii.**
**[282] Janz, 2007. 692.**
**[283] Bello, 264.**

way diminishes its universal relevance, but rather enriches it in certain regards. And in view of this, African philosophy can be seen as the African perspective or reflection on problems of a universal status. According to Sodipo, "When you say 'African philosophy', you are drawing attention to that aspect of philosophy which arises from a special problem and the unique experience of African people."

**4.0: Conclusion**

The point to be made from the foregoing analysis is that issues concerning the definition, methodology and content of African philosophy are, to a large extent, construed by different scholars, from the view point of the school or orientation to which they belong. These groupings are divided according to their understanding of what African philosophy should be and they are united based on the similarities of their positions. In this unit, we have identified and examined four different orientations in African philosophy according to the most popular classification by Odera Oruka.

**5.0: Summary**

Despite the shades of opinion on how the subject of African philosophy can be approached, the prevailing position is that there are four main orientations to African philosophy. This position was popularised by Henry Odera Oruka who identifies the orientations as ethno-philosophy, philosophic sagacity, nationalist-ideological philosophy, and professional philosophy. Ethno-philosophy refers to the position that African traditional practices, proverbs, belief systems and folklores constitute the content, or at least the basic material, for authentic African philosophy. Philosophic-sagacity' rests on the view that philosophy resides in the minds of individuals and that there are specific individuals in traditional African societies who, uninfluenced by Western thoughts, had original thoughts that could be regarded as philosophical. Nationalist-ideological philosophy grew out of the need for the emerging class of political leaders in Africa to give a theoretical or philosophical grounding to their ideas, a grounding that, for most of them, was to be found in traditional African ideas about social and political realities. Professional philosophy sees philosophy as a universal discipline with no cultural colouration, practised solely by professional, Western-trained philosophers in strict adherence to the canons of critical rationality that define the activity of philosophy as a universal discipline.

**6.0: Self-Assessment Exercise**

i. Briefly explain each of the following orientations in African philosophy:
   a. Ethno-philosophy
   b. Philosophic sagacity
   c. Nationalist-ideological philosophy
   d. Professional philosophy

iii. To what extent is one's perspective on the definition, methodology and content of African philosophy a function of the orientation one is coming from?

**7.0: References/Further Reading**


Bello, A. G. A. (2004) "Some methodological controversies in African philosophy." K. Wiredu, (ed.). *A Companion to African Philosophy.* Malden: Blackwell Publishing.

Bodunrin, P. O. (1981) "The question of African philosophy" Vol. 56:12.

Deacon, M. "The status of Father Tempels and ethnophilosophy in the discourse of African philosophy". P.H. Coetzee and A.P.J. Roux (eds.). *The African philosophy reader* (second edition). London: Routledge.

Gbadegegin, S. (1991) *African philosophy: traditional Yoruba philosophy and contemporary African realities*. New York: Peter Lang.

Hountondji, P. (1996) *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Janz, B. B. (2007) "African Philosophy". Boundas, C. (ed.). *Companion to 20th Century Philosophy*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Oladipo, O. (2000) *The idea of African philosophy.* Ibadan: Hope Publications.

Oruka, H. O. (1978) "Four trends in current African philosophy" presented at the William Amo Symposium in Accra, 24-29 July.

Wiredu, K. (2004) "Introduction: African Philosophy in Our Time." Wiredu, K. (ed.). *A Companion to African Philosophy,* Malden: Blackwell Publishing.

## UNIT 3: ISSUES IN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

**Contents**



### 1.0: Introduction

Welcome to this unit where we will be discussing some perennial issues in African philosophy such as the question of identity, relevance and language. As the discourse on African philosophy unfolds, many issues emerge that occupy the attention of thinkers. Even though these issues are many and varied, we shall, in this unit restrict ourselves to the three issues mentioned above, which are: the issues of identity, language and relevance.

### 2.0: Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

At the end of this unit, the student would have learnt about:

- the many issues that African philosophy deals with, among which are the problem of identity, relevance and language;
- the importance of each of these issues; and
- the core points addressed by each issue.

### 3.0: Main Content: Issues in African philosophy

### 3.1: Identity

There are those who see the issue of identity as central to the discussion on African philosophy. Anthony Kwame Appiah, for example, sees the African – as well as his intellectual efforts and outputs – as being predominantly focused on the question of identity, as distinct from the Western focus on authenticity. According to him,

> A central culture of philosophical questions that faces every contemporary African of a reflective disposition centers on questions of identity. A great deal of ethical and political weight is borne by many identities – ethnic, national, racial, and continental – in the life of modern Africa. And a great

> deal of modern African literature has naturally had these questions at its heart.[284]

He says further:

> For there is a profound difference between the projects of contemporary European and African writers: a difference I shall summarize, for the sake of a slogan, as the difference between the search for the self and the search for a culture or, equivalently, as the difference between the search for authenticity and the search for identity.[285]

Philosophy in Africa from the middle of the twentieth century started, and has spent much of its attention, on the question of the African identity. According to Bruce Janz,

> A perennial concern in African philosophy has been the nature of African personhood and identity. Is being African in some way unique, qualitatively different from other ways of being human, or is one human first and African (or some other particularization) second? (Janz, 2007: 693).

Why does this happen to be important in African philosophy when, apparently, it is no issue elsewhere? It is because the African had been (and, one might say, continues to be) characterised as being mentally inferior to others, especially the European. In response to this, scholars like Senghor explained that the African is in no way intellectually lower than others, even if he thinks differently from others. To this effect, Senghor posited that, while the Western way of thinking is clinical and detached, the African engages in 'reason by embrace'; and while the European employs *ratio*, the African employs *logos* and thus 'participates' in the object of his intellectual quest.

Many subsequent scholars have objected to this characterisation by Senghor. For one thing, it seems to inadvertently affirm what it seeks to deny, which is that Africans are intellectually different, emotional and incapable of reasoning things out in an objective manner. Others, especially in francophone Africa, question the implication of his position that Africans are a different species of humanity.[286] If Africans are human, they must share in the strengths and weaknesses of the human reasoning faculty.

But one important thing that Senghor and Tempels – as well as others like Kagame and Mbiti – have achieved is the assertion that Africans are in no way inferior to others as far as the ability to reason is concerned.

---

**[284] Appiah, A. K. (2004). "African philosophy and African literature." Wiredu, K. (ed.). *A Companion to African philosophy.* Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004. 538.**

**[285] Ibid. 539.**

**[286] Wiredu, 2004. 5.**

Another strand of thought on the African identity involves the implicit racism that is believed to be embedded in earlier studies of Africans by Europeans – right up to the twentieth century – which have constituted the foundation of present-day intellectual interests in Africa and Africans. This view, therefore, asserts that an African philosophy that is based on such studies does more harm than good, as it continues the practice of discussing Africans as mere objects or specimens. It is in this sense that Paulin Hountondji and V. Y. Mudimbe see ethno-philosophy as an extension of an ethnological conversation about Africa that was meant to be between European writers and a European audience, to the exclusion of Africans themselves.

It definitely bothers Hountondji (as it might anyone who cares about identity and originality) that African scholarship is essentially a participation in – or sometimes, a reaction to – outsiders' discussions on Africa. This tendency for African scholarship to merely be a response to Euro-American ideas is stated by Oyèrónké Oyéwùmi thus:

> An assessment of African studies… will reveal that it is by and large 'reactionary'. Reaction, in essence, has been at once the driving force of African studies and its limitation in all its branches. It does not matter whether any particular scholar is reacting for or against the West; the point is that the West is at the centre of African knowledge-production. For instance, a whole generation of African historians have reconstructed African history, complete with kings, empires, and even wars, to disprove European claims that Africans are peoples without history. In other fields, a lot of ink has been spilled (and trees felled) to refute or support assertions about whether some African peoples have states or are stateless peoples. Now, in the closing years of the twentieth century, arguably the hottest debate in African studies is whether Africans had philosophy before European contact or whether Africans are best described as 'philosophyless' peoples. This is perhaps the most recent phase in an old Western concern with the evolving status of African primitivism, where the indices have moved from historylessness to statelessness and now to philosophylessness.
>
> Whether the discussion focuses on history or historylessness, on having a state or being stateless, it is clear that the West is the norm against which Africans continue to be measured by others and often by themselves.[287]

But if African philosophy, as posited by Hountondji and some others, is nothing but the participation of Africans in philosophy, the question arises: Who is an African? Is the

**[287] Oyéwùmi, O. (1993). "Visualizing the body." P.H. Coetzee and A.P.J. Roux (eds.) *The African philosophy Reader*. 469-470**

African in some fundamental way different from others, such that his philosophising will be radically different from others'? These are questions that tend to make the discussion into a vicious circle as they take us back to Senghor and Tempels and their attempts to fashion an equal but different humanity for Africans.

### 3.2: Relevance

The issue of relevance has been at the root of the discourse on African philosophy since the 20th century. The question of what difference African philosophy makes to Africa has never been far from the minds of most scholars and students of African philosophy. And even though there is a wide variety of opinions as far as relevance is concerned, few would disagree as to whether or not African philosophy should be relevant.

It is in furtherance of the need for relevance, we can argue, that the earliest twentieth-century scholars like Tempels and Senghor carried out their pioneering efforts in African philosophy, arguing for the rationality of Africans. Thus, for them, African philosophy arose, at least in part, out of the desire to meet some important need, prime among which is the need for relevance. But Senghor's position has been harshly criticised by some others who, interestingly, equally believe that philosophy has to be relevant in Africa but disagree as to how this is to come about. According to Marcien Towa, for instance,

> Senghorian negritude, and ethnophilosophy which seeks to perpetuate it, foster the illusion that Africa can offer to Europe a heightening of its soul (*un supplément d'âme*) before the complete liquidation of European imperialism in Africa. In reality, no cultural development of any importance will be possible in Africa until she has built up a material strength capable of guaranteeing her sovereignty and her power of decision not only in the political and economic field but also in the cultural. Our inferiority in material terms places our culture at the mercy of the great powers in our time.[288]

From the latter part of the twentieth century, the traditionalist-professional (or, we might say, universalist-particularist) debate predominated African philosophy such that the question of what African philosophy should be, constituted the major content of the discourse. But for a philosopher like Olusegun Oladipo, the debate misses the point and, by implication, does not have much to contribute to African philosophy or to Africa in general. This is because for him,

> …the problematic that they both address are externally derived. What we see in the (analytic) position is an attempt to protect disciplinary boundaries as established by Western

**[288] quoted in Irele, A. 1996. "Introduction" in Hountondji, P. *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press.) 25.**

> intellectual practice. And manifested in the (traditionalist) position is a preoccupation with the nationalistic imperative in modern intellectual expression, a preoccupation which has nurtured oppositions such as 'Africa versus the West' and 'tradition versus modernity'. Clearly lacking in both positions is a concerned effort to link philosophical research to contemporary African realities. Hence, their inability to make significant contributions to self-knowledge in Africa.[289]

He goes on to say,

> The problem surrounding the idea of African philosophy is not that of fashioning an authentic philosophy which will be true to African cultures and traditions. Nor is it a problem of a division between those who advocate a strong Western orientation in African philosophy and those who take a deviant route….Rather, the problem is that of the extent to which African philosophers can put their intellects in the service of the aspirations and struggles of African peoples.[290]

Oladipo affirms strongly that the commitment of the African Philosopher will neither be to a culture, nor to a discipline, "but in terms of the conscious and sustained application of critical and reflective thinking to various aspects of African life and experiences."[291]

Other scholars have voiced their concern for a philosophy that has relevance to existential issues in Africa. As already pointed out, the entire spectrum of opinions on African philosophy is involved in the quest for relevance, even if there is no agreement as to what it means to be relevant or how philosophy can be relevant in Africa. For instance, Segun Gbadegesin says,

> I am convinced of the reasonableness of the belief that, if philosophy as an academic discipline is to mean anything to Africa in the present situation of its existence, it has to be made relevant to the realities that confront Africans."[292]

For him, this represents "a foundation upon which a lasting structure of an African philosophical tradition can be built."[293]

---

**[289] Oladipo, 2000. 18.**
**[290] Ibid. 7.**
**[291] Oladipo, O. 2009. *Philosophy and social reconstruction in Africa,* (Ibadan: Hope Publications). xii**
**[292] Gbadegesin, 1991. xi.**
**[293] Ibid.**

Kwame Gyekye also points out how philosophy can make a difference in Africa, with an emphasis on the political situation in Africa, demonstrating how philosophy has actually made the same kind of difference in other climes through history.[294] And Abiola Irele, in his "Introduction" to Paulin Hountondji's *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*, says,

> The present focus of African reflection, as dictated by the realities of the postcolonial era, has been the immediate and practical issues of 'development', understood as a process of the accommodation of African lives to the demands of modernity. It is especially in this connection that the observed divergence between traditional values in Africa and the Western paradigm that governs the very idea of modernity has come to assume a practical importance and to represent something of a dilemma.[295]

In sum, the question of relevance is one that engages the attention of most African philosophers, irrespective of orientation; and it is a legitimate concern, given the difference that philosophy has made throughout human history.

**3.3: Language**

The issue of language is a central concern in African philosophy, and many questions have emerged with regard to language in African philosophy. Such questions include whether it is necessary to philosophise in an African language, or whether it would do to merely make reference to particular African concepts that are relevant to the discourse while the discourse itself is carried out in a cosmopolitan language; whether African languages are suited to the philosophical activity, or they should be given up completely as far as philosophising is concerned; whether meanings are lost in a significant way when the philosophy of a certain African culture is carried out in another language; whether a language so carries the identity and thought system of a culture that it amounts to a denial or disrespect of the culture to discuss it in a foreign language; and whether our understanding of concepts in Western philosophy will be significantly different if we consider them in an African language. At the root of these questions is the dual realisation that language is important, and that it matters what language one uses to express oneself.

In his *Bantu Philosophy*, Tempels says,

> Since we are going to treat philosophy, we should use the philosophical terminology accessible to the European reader.

[294] **See Gyekye, 1997. 15-23.**
[295] **Irele, 1996. 9.**

> As the thought of the Bantu is foreign to ours, we shall call theirs provisionally "the philosophy of magic", though our terminology will not, perhaps, fully cover their thought. Our terms can furnish only an approximation to concepts and principles foreign to us.
> Even if we were to employ a literal translation of Bantu terms, we should have to explain to the uninitiated reader the exact force of these native expressions.
> We shall, therefore, use English terminology, specifying on every occasion the limitations or extensions by which the received meaning of the terms should be qualified in order to express the Bantu concept exactly.[296]

In his discourse on conceptual decolonisation, Wiredu (who has given a lot of his scholarly attention to what he calls 'conceptual decolonisation') points out that the superimposition of foreign categories on African thought came through three principal avenues, the first of which is language, which he calls the "most fundamental, subtle, pervasive and intractable circumstance of mental colonisation."[297] He goes on to say:

> By definition, the fundamental concepts of philosophy are the most fundamental categories of human thought. But the particular modes of thought that yield these concepts may reflect the specifics of the culture, environment and even the accidental idiosyncrasies of the people concerned. Conceptual idiosyncrasy, although an imponderable complication in human affairs, probably accounts for a vast proportion of the conceptual disparities among different philosophical traditions, especially the ones in which the individual technical philosophers are deeply implicated. Think, then, of the possible enormity of the avoidable philosophical deadwood we might be carrying through our historically enforced acquisition of philosophical training in the medium of foreign languages.[298]

The implication of this, in our consideration, is not just that we will be avoiding unnecessary 'philosophical deadwood' when we conceptualise philosophical issues in African languages, but that we will equally be contributing at a global level to the explication and understanding of the concepts and ideas we employ in philosophy. Elsewhere, Wiredu points out the conceptual quandary in which trained African philosophers (and, we might say, African scholars generally) find themselves:

---

[296] **Tempels, 1959. 27.**
[297] **Wiredu, 1995. 23.**
[298] **Ibid.**

> Now if you learn philosophy in a given language, that is the language in which you naturally philosophize, not just during the learning period but also, all things being equal, for life. But a language, most assuredly, is not conceptually neutral; syntax and vocabulary are apt to suggest definite modes of conceptualization. Nevertheless, the starting point of the problem is that the African who has learned philosophy in English, for example, has most likely become conceptually westernized to a large extent not by choice but by the force of historical circumstances. To that same extent, he may have become de-Africanized. It does not matter if the philosophy learned was African philosophy. If that philosophy was academically formulated in English and articulated therein, the message was already substantially westernized, unless there was a conscious effort toward cross-cultural filtration.[299]

This shows the difficulty of doing African philosophy, even for African scholars themselves, and the resultant conceptual poverty related to it. Yet, philosophy in Africa is hardly possible (or, at least, fruitful) if the scholars involved are ignorant of African conceptual schemes. According to Bello,

> In particular, African languages can be employed in the task of supporting or refuting ‘‘popular’’ (or ‘‘unpopular,’’ if you like) conceptions about African thought and culture. They can also be employed in elucidating the concepts that Africans live by. Such elucidations can be enhanced by comparing the concepts in question with corresponding concepts in other philosophical traditions.[300]

Yet, in the same paper, Bello complains of ‘linguistic inadequacy’ when translating Western concepts into an African language.[301] However, this does not seem a fundamental problem if one is doing African philosophy. For one thing, the key concepts being dealt with are, to a considerable extent, local; and, for another, importing and adapting foreign terms, where necessary, can be done, knowing that most technical terms in English and other European languages today are of foreign – mostly Greek and Latin – origin.

Expressing her concern over the marginal status of African languages in African scholarship, Oyèrónké Oyéwùmi says:

> Yoruba discourse in English is a particularly good place to examine the problems of Westocentricity in the determination

**[299] Wiredu, K. 1998. “Towards Decolonising African Philosophy and Religion.” *African Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 1, Issue 4. 1998. 17.**
**[300] Bello, 2004. 267.**
**[301] Ibid. 267-270.**

> of research questions, because scholars of Yoruba origin are very well represented. As an anthropologist in a recent monograph puts it, 'Western scholars don't write about the Yoruba; they write with the Yoruba'. Prepositions aside, the reverse is more the case—Yoruba scholars write with the West about Yoruba. This is revealed in the failure to take Yoruba language seriously in Yoruba scholarship—the language is that of West. The lack of interest in the Yoruba language beyond 'fieldworkese' is not surprising, since African studies is one of the few areas in the academy where one can claim to be an expert without the benefit of language competence. African nationalities are said to be based on language groups, but the marginalization of language in African studies belies this fact.[302]

Concernng Africa's marginal status, Ngugi wa Thiong'o shows forcefully how identity and language are jointly implicated in what he calls the 'cultural bomb' of imperialism. According to him,

> The effect of a cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other peoples' languages rather than their own. It makes them identify with that which is decadent and reactionary, all those forces which would stop their own springs of life.[303]

We shall end this section by quoting from *Bantu Philosophy*, in which Tempels makes a statement about the critical importance of African language and its relation to ontology:

> One of my colleagues… remarked: "It is odd: these people do not speak as we do: they speak so "realistically". In fact, primitive language is very "realistic". Their words lead to the real nature of things. They speak "ontologically". The quality of "*mfumu*" is added to the common humanity of an individual neither by external nomination, nor by singling him out. He becomes and is "*mfumu*" by endowment

**[302] Oyéwùmi, 2003. 476.**

**[303] Ngugi wa Thiong'o. *Decolonising the Mind*, (Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1981.) 3.**

> therewith: he is a new, higher vital force capable of strengthening and maintaining everything which falls ontologically within his care.[304]

**4.0: Conclusion**

Even though there are myriads of issues in African philosophy, we have discussed, in this unit, those of identity, relevance and language; and we have seen how these go to the very heart of the enterprise of African philosophy. We conclude on this note: these issues are important to the discourse of African philosophy; for certain reasons, they have more weight in African philosophy than in other philosophical traditions; and, correctly approached, they contribute not only to Africa's self-understanding, but also to the general elucidation of issues of a universal nature.

**5.0: Summary**

In this unit, we have been able to point out that:

- there are many issues in African philosophy;
- identity, relevance and language constitute some of the core issues;
- for the particularists and universalists, identity constitutes an important index for African philosophy and its practitioners;
- identity in African philosophy has a lot to do with whether Africans are human in the same sense as non-Africans;
- for relevance, African philosophy has to show how it contributes to resolving the existential issues in Africa;
- since language is important not only in communication but also in identity and especially in understanding, African philosophy has to grapple with the issue of language.

**6.0: Self-Assessment Exercise**

- Briefly explain the problem of identity, relevance and language, as issues in African philosophy
- Do you agree with the view that the meaning of words and concepts would be lost in a significant way when the philosophy of a certain culture is carried out in another language?
- To what extent is it true that African philosophy arose basically out of the desire to establish its relevance?

**7.0: References/Further Reading**

Appiah, A. K. 2004. "African philosophy and African literature." Wiredu, K. (ed.). *A Companion to African philosophy.* Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004.

[304] **Tempels, 1959. 67.**

Bello, A. G. A. 2004. “Some methodological controversies in African philosophy.” Wiredu, K. (ed.). *A Companion to African philosophy.* Malden: Blackwell Publishing. 263-273.
Gbadegesin, S. 1991. *African Philosophy: Traditional Yoruba Philosophy and Contemporary African Realities,* New York: Peter Lang.
Gyekye, K. 1997. *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience,* New York: Oxford University Press.
Idowu, E. B. 1973. *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*, London: SCM Press Ltd.
Irele, A. 1996. “Introduction” in Hountondji, Paulin *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality*.
Janz, B. B. 2007. “African Philosophy”. Boundas, C. (ed.). *Companion to 20th Century Philosophy,* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
Ngugi wa Thiong’o 1981. *Decolonising the Mind*, Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House.
Oladipo, O. 2000. *The Idea of African Philosophy*, Ibadan: Hope Publications
Oladipo, O. 2009. *Philosophy and social reconstruction in Africa,* Ibadan: Hope Publications.
Oyéwùmi, O. 1993. “Visualizing the body.” P.H. Coetzee and A.P.J. Roux (eds.) *The African philosophy Reader*.
Tempels, P. 1959. *Bantu Philosophy,* Paris: Presence Africaine.
Wiredu, K. 1995. “Conceptual Decolonisation in African Philosophy.” 1998. Towards Decolonising African Philosophy and Religion. *African Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 1, Issue 4.

## UNIT 4: SUB-DISCIPLINARY FOCUS ON AFRICAN PHILOSOPHY

**Contents**



### 1.0: Introduction

Welcome to the last unit of this module, where we will be reflecting on the sub-disciplinary focus in African philosophy. African philosophy, like philosophy in general, can be sub-divided into different branches. In this unit, four branches of African philosophy, along the lines of the core divisions of general philosophy, shall be examined, in order to see and understand the peculiarity of the African dimension to these branches. These branches are African Metaphysics; African Epistemology; African Ethics and African Logic.

### 2.0: Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

The major outcome that is intended in discussing the sub-disciplinary focus on African philosophy is that the student should understand:

- and be familiar with the branches of African philosophy;
- that these branches are, to a considerable extent, a replication of the branches of philosophy in general;
- what distinguishes these branches from their content in Western philosophy.

### 3.0: Main Content: Sub-Branches of African Philosophy

### 3.1: African metaphysics

'Metaphysics' is the term used to describe "the investigation of the ultimate principles, causes, origins, constituents, and categories of all things.[305] Scholars generally agree that metaphysics is the most profound aspect of African philosophy, and its very core. This is understandable, given that the matter of existence and existents, causes and effects, as

[305] **Velkley, R. 2000. "What is Metaphysics?" Rosen Stanley (ed.),** ***The Philosopher's Handbook*****, New York: Random House. 311.**

well as modes of existence, constitute the heart of philosophy, as whatever is to be reflected on, must of necessity first exist, in order to be studied.
Since contemporary African philosophy can be said to have begun with Placide Tempels' *Bantu Philosophy*, it might be expedient to start from his 'African metaphysics' and proceed therefrom, disregarding his often condescending manner of describing Africans. Describing how the Bantu (and, by extension, the African – for he sometimes uses these terms interchangeably in the work, along with terms like 'primitive' or 'native') ontology apprehends the matter of cause and effect, Tempels says,

> They have a different conception of the relationships between men, of causality and responsibility. What we regard as the illogical lucubrations of "gloomy Niggers", what we condemn as greed, exploitation of the weak, are for them logical deductions from facts as they see them, and become an ontological necessity.[306]

He points out how European studies of 'primitive' religion has characterised it as consisting in ancestor worship, magic, and so on, "until finally it was discovered that primitive peoples originally had a faith in and a worship of the supreme Being, the creative Spirit."[307] About this, he goes on to say:

> What has been called magic, animism, ancestor-worship, or dynamism – in short, all the customs of the Bantu – depend upon a single principle, knowledge of the Inmost Nature of beings, that is to say, upon their Ontological Principle. For is it not by means of this philosophical term that we must express their knowledge of being, of the existence of things?[308]

Tempels identifies what has been translated as the *vital force* as the most fundamental principle in African ontology, that which constitutes the basis of all existence. He says:

> Certain words are constantly being used by Africans….This supreme value is life, force, to live strongly, or vital force.… The Bantu say… that their purpose is to acquire life, strength or vital force…. In every Bantu language, it is easy to recognize the words or phrases denoting a force, which is not used in an exclusively bodily sense, but in the sense of the integrity of our whole being…. When they try to get away from metaphors and periphrases, the Bantu speak of God himself as "the Strong One", he who possesses Force in

[306] **Tempels, 1959. 21.**
[307] **Ibid. 22.**
[308] **Ibid. 23.**

> himself. He is also the source of the Force of every creature.[309]

Following Tempels, Alexis Kagame identified *being* with *vital force*. More rigorously than Tempels, he distinguished, *a là* Aristotle, four categories of being:
*Umuntu*: "the human being,"
*Ikintu*: "a thing,"
*Ahantu*: "somewhere," and
*Ukuntu*: "the manner," which includes seven of Aristotle's categories (quantity, quality, relation, action, emotion, position, possession) instrumental for his hierarchy of vital forces.[310]

Scholars like Leopold Senghor, John S. Mbiti, Alexis Kagame and others believe that the African is ontologically constituted to have his being in relation with other beings – God and spirits, nature, other human beings (dead, living and the unborn), etc. Thus, in contrast to Rene Descartes' dictum, "*Cogito, ergo sum*" ("I think, therefore I am"), Mbiti says, "I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am."[311]
This being-in-relation of African ontology leads to what is popularly regarded today as the hierarchy of being. In most African societies, there is a hierarchy of being, with the Supreme Being at the top, and followed by the lesser deities, spirits, ancestors, the living humans, the unborn, vegetation, and the elements.[312]
Relating the idea of vital force to the hierarchy of being, Tempels says, for instance:

> (T)he Bantu speak of God himself as "the Strong One", he who possesses Force in himself. He is also the source of the Force of every creature…. The spirits of the first ancestors, highly exalted in the superhuman world, possess extraordinary force inasmuch as they are the founders of the human race and propagators of the divine inheritance of vital human strength. The other dead are esteemed only to the extent to which they increase and perpetuate their vital force in their progeny. In the minds of Bantu, all beings in the universe possess vital force of their own: human, animal, vegetable, or inanimate.[313]

According to Tempels,

---

**[309] Tempels, ibid. 30-31**
**[310] Mudimbe, V. Y. 1986. "On the question of an African philosophy: the case of French speaking Africa." Mowoe, I. J. and Bjornson, R. (eds.) Africa and the West: legacies of an empire, New York: Greenwood Press. 94.**
**[311] Mbiti, 1991. 108.**
**[312] See Idowu, E. B. 1973. *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*, London: SCM Ltd. for a detailed discussion of this.**
**[313] Tempels, 1959. 31.**

> When the Bantu thus indicate human categories, they do not envisage a classification based upon accidental differences, but rather a gradation in the essential quality of men in accordance with the intensity of their vital force.[314]

In African thought, being is dynamic existent. The term '*in-relation*' might be seen to sum up the African conception of life and reality, in which being is not separated from force as its attribute. Thus in a sense, we can say that African metaphysics would define being as "that which is force" or "an existent force", as against Western metaphysics which defines "being" as "that which is" or "a thing, in-so-far as it is". God, for the African, is the Great Force.

Causality in African thought can be seen in terms of interaction of forces. In African thought, created beings preserve a bond one with another in an intimate ontological, causal relationship. There is interaction of being with being; that is to say, of forces with forces, transcending mechanical, chemical and psychological interactions. Forces either strengthen or weaken one another. Causality in African thought is not exclusively mechanical, though it definitely involves that. In this regard, while making reference to J. O. Sodipo's "Notes on the Concept of Cause and Chance in Yoruba Traditional Thought," Bodunrin points out:

> Scientific causal explanations cannot explain certain features of some occurrences. Thus, while the wetness of the road, the ineffectiveness of the brakes and driver's carelessness, etc., may explain why accidents generally happen, they cannot explain why it has happened to a particular person, place and at exactly the time it happened.[315]

The African concept of being is a vital force since being is not static but dynamic and is thought to be alive. In other words, every being is endowed with force; reality is an inseparable mixture of "mind" and matter; and all forces are in constant interaction. There is a hierarchy of forces concatenated in an all-pervading universe.

### 3.2: African Epistemology

Epistemology is, in simple terms, the theory of knowledge. It is the discourse on knowledge that seeks to understand and determine the possibility, extent and conditions for our knowledge claims.
African epistemology, for Tempels,

---

**[314] Ibid. 67.**
**[315] Bodunrin, 1981. 174.**

> consists in the discernment of the nature of beings, of forces: true wisdom lies in ontological knowledge…. God knows. He gives man "power" to know.… There is, therefore, the force of knowing, just as there is a force of willing. Therefore men have the power of knowing…. True knowledge, human wisdom, then, will equally be metaphysical: it will be the intelligence of forces, of their hierarchy, their cohesion and their interaction.[316]

Wiredu contends that, when epistemology is approached from an African perspective, it becomes clear that certain assumptions that undergird Western epistemology do not constitute necessary conditions for the human understanding of the issues involved. He makes particular reference to Rene Descates' '*cogito, ergo sum*'. John Mbiti, in Wiredu's estimation, has implied that the *cogito* "betrays an individualist outlook, to which he has counterposed what he takes to be the African communalist axiom…."[317] At a more fundamental level, however, Kagame's response to the *cogito* demonstrates that it would be unintelligible to an African:

> But by far the most conceptually interesting African comment on Descartes' claim was that by Alexis Kagame who pointed out that throughout the Bantu zone, a remark like 'I think, therefore I am' would be unintelligible, for the verb 'to be' is always followed by an attribute or an adjunct of place: I am good, big, etc., I am in such and such a place, etc. Thus, the utterance "…therefore, I am" would prompt the question "You are … what … where?" Kagame's point holds very exactly in the Akan language also….[318]

On further analysis, Wiredu demonstrates that existence, which is the core point of the *cogito*, is, to the Akan, intrinsically spatial; in fact, locative. To the Akan, without the locative element of a statement like "I think, therefore I am", all meaning is lost. "It is scarcely necessary," he concludes, "to point out that this is diametrically opposed to Descartes' construal of the particular cogitation under scrutiny,"[319] for Descartes' statement implies primarily that to be and to exist in space are completely different from each other.

The point of all this is not primarily to dispute with Descartes or to prove him wrong, but that, when philosophical problems are analysed from a perspective that does not share the categories of the milieu in which the problems are construed, the unexamined presumptions that accompany them become starkly obvious.

In this same regard, Barry Hallen and J. Olubi Sodipo (1997) have argued that the English word "know" does not translate unproblematically into Yoruba, since "mo", the

---

**[316] Tempels, 1959. 47-48.**

**[317] Wiredu, 1995. 27.**

**[318] Ibid.**

**[319] Wiredu, 1995. 28.**

nearest Yoruba approximation, still requires eyewitness acquaintance.[320] Furthermore, the investigations of Hallen and Sodipo into Yoruba epistemology have revealed that, for the Yoruba, justified true belief (JTB) does not suffice as a condition for knowledge. In other words, the conditions for a valid knowledge claim are more stringent in Yoruba thought, as there is a fourth condition: an eyewitness acquaintance with what is claimed to be known.

Senghor's negritude implies that, epistemologically, the African is able to acquire knowledge of objects by interacting with them, as against the detached, clinical epistemic disposition of Europeans. This he calls 'knowledge by embrace'. Commenting on Senghor, Wiredu says,

> (H)is Negritude is, of course, a philosophy of black identity. Senghor argued that black people had a particular way of knowing, determined by their psychophysiology, which may be described as knowing by participation. In contrast to Western ways of knowing, which, he said, analyzes the object, breaking it into pieces, so to speak, African cognition proceeded by embracing the object.[321]

The basis of this, of course, is found in the African ontology in which Senghor and some others hold that the African is a being-in-relation. Commenting on the difference between Western and African epistemologies, Isaac Ukpokolo says,

> The dynamics of the western position largely rest on an ontological conception that separates the object of knowledge from the subject. In contrast to the western view, the African epistemological notion is that other variables, like the condition of being of the cognitive agent and environmental and social factors, play a role in the process of cognition and ultimately define and justify the cognitive claims of the agent. An African Theory of Knowledge upholds the view that there is a distinct way in which the African mind perceives, understands and justifies its epistemic claims.[322]

It should be pointed out, however, that, even though environmental and other factors may influence an individual's perception and understanding of reality, this should not in any way imply that the African is incapable of objective perception or knowledge, as that would open up the avenue for characterising the African as being, at least, mentally different if not inferior.

### 3.3: African Ethics

---

**[320] Wiredu, 2004. 14.**

**[321] Ibid. 6.**

**[322] Ukpokolo, I. E. 2017. "Introduction: The Shifting Focus of Philosophy in Africa." Ukpokolo, I. E. (ed.). *Issues, Themes and Problems in African Philosophy*, Switzerland: Palmgrave Macmillan. 5**

Ethics is essentially about the rightness or wrongness of human conduct or action. It is the philosophical study or discourse on morality. Morality is a key factor in the stability of any human society. As Wiredu points out,

> Morality in the strictest sense is universal to human culture. Indeed, it is essential to all human culture. Any society without a modicum of morality must collapse. But what is morality in this sense? It is simply the observance of rules for the harmonious adjustment of the interests of the individual to those of others in society. This, of course, is a minimal concept of morality. A richer concept of morality even more pertinent to human flourishing will have an essential reference to that special kind of motivation called the sense of duty.[323]

Morality covers the entire range of human behaviour that is involved in one's relationship with oneself, with other persons and with the world as well. According to J. A. I. Bewaji,

> Morality and ethics in Western and non-Western societies have similar importance in that human social and interpersonal behaviour is under the necessity of the adjustment of interests among individuals for attaining the general well-being of the community.[324]

Wiredu elsewhere makes a case for a specifically African ethics since, according to him, Africa today, living as it does in a cultural flux, is plagued by the superimposition of Western conceptions of the good upon African thought and conduct, such that "it may well be that many of the instabilities of contemporary African society are traceable to this circumstance."[325]

There have been disputes about certain fundamental aspects of ethics as regards Africa. For instance, some scholars believe that Africans have no morality. Some others hold that African morality is based on appeals to the supernatural. Yet some others see African morality as a set of dos and don'ts that have no strong theoretical basis. While one may argue for or against each of these positions, the truth seems to lie in the fact that there are elements of each in African morality. But what seems indubitably obvious is that African morality is, to a considerable extent, communitarian. For Wiredu, African conceptions of morals would seem generally to be of a humanistic orientation.[326] He says further,

> Correspondingly, what is good in the more narrowly ethical sense is, by definition, what is conducive to the

---

**[323] Wiredu, 1998. 337.**

**[324] Bewaji, J. A. I. 2004. "Ethics and Morality in Yoruba Culture." Wiredu, K. (ed.). *A Companion to African Philosophy.* Malden: Blackwell Publishing. 396.**

**[325] Wiredu, 1995. 33.**

**[326] Wiredu, 1998. 338.**

> harmonization of those interests. Thus, the will of God, not to talk of that of any other extra-human being, is logically incapable of defining the good.[327]

This is a position also taken by a number of other scholars, including Oladipo and Gbadegesin.

Africans see a relationship between morality and the ontological order. Everything is associated and coordinated under the all-embracing unity of the "vital force." In judging his conduct, the African takes into consideration the fear that he is not alone; that he is a cog in a wheel of interacting forces. He knows that the most important thing in his action is not how it affects him personally, but how it affects the world order, the spiritual republic outside of which he does not exist as a *muntu;* outside of which he is like a planet off its orbit: meaningless and non-existing. His life is not his own: it belongs to God and the community. The strengthening of this life, its preservation, are in the hands of his ancestors and elders. In the life of the community, each person has his place and each has his right to well-being and happiness. Therefore, what to do and what to avoid in order to preserve, increase and strengthen the vital force in himself and others of his clan, constitute morality. Bantu moral standards depend essentially on things ontologically understood.

It follows that an act will be accounted ethically good if it can be adjudged ontologically good and by deduction assessed as juristically just. The African ethical theory is metaphysical ethics in one sense and ethical communalism in another, where an individual takes into consideration the community of vital force in deciding the goodness or evil of his proper actions.
The connection between epistemology and ethics (or morality) in African philosophy was underscored by Barry Hallen and J. Olubi Sodipo when the explain that, because of the problem of establishing the veracity of a knowledge claim in which one does not have first-hand experience, one has to depend on the character of the informant. According to Hallen,

> The moral underpinnings to this discussion of Yoruba epistemology become evident once one recognizes that the primary source of propositional or secondhand information in an oral culture is other persons. For, if that is the case, knowledge of those other persons' moral characters (iwa) – their honesty, their reliability as sources of information – becomes a fundamental criterion to evaluating the reliability of secondhand information obtained from them.[328]

---

**[327] Ibid. 339.**

**[328] Hallen, B. 2004. "Yoruba moral epistemology." Wiredu, K. (ed.). *A companion to African philosophy,* Malden: Blackwell Publishing. 301.**

African ethics is therefore, in many ways, like ethics elsewhere. However, a distinctive feature of African ethics is that it is communitarian in nature, and whatever will be considered good must be something that furthers the good of the community.

### 3.4: African Logic

Logic concerns itself with reasoning, as well as the rules involved in determining a process of reasoning as either sound or unsound. The relevance of African logic is easily seen in the fact that African philosophy, at least in part, is a reaction against the charge that Africans are irrational and pre-logical. If this is the case, a primary task of African philosophy would be to demonstrate that Africans are indeed logical, even if their reasoning may not necessarily follow the same pattern as the Europeans.

Following the work of Evans-Pritchard on 'Witchcraft and Magic among the Azande in Africa', Peter Winch supports the conclusion of the former in disagreeing with the claims of Lucien Levy-Bruhl. Levy-Bruhl had claimed that 'primitive' peoples have practices which differ from those of Westerners in that they (the 'primitives') have minds the structure of which is not suited to logical thought.[329] Against this, Evans-Pritchard argues that 'primitive' peoples do not, in one sense, think any differently from Westerners. Where they differ is not so much in thinking differently as in appealing to different principles of explanation, since a 'primitive' would, in the event of a rainfall, make reference to the activity of witches rather than to natural causes (Mounce, 1973:347). A savage, according to Evans-Pritchard, is not being illogical in explaining the occurrence of rainfall by referring to the activity of witches.

> This is because logic has to do with the validity of inference and not with the truth or falsity of premises. A valid inference is one in which the conclusion would be true were the premises true, the truth of the premises being irrelevant. Now if one holds that there are beings such as witches who are responsible for producing rainfall, one is being perfectly logical in explaining a particular occurrence of rainfall by referring to their activity.[330]

Along this line of thinking, Bodunrin says,

> In one sense, a system of beliefs is rational if, once you understand the system, individual beliefs within it make sense; in other words, if one could see why members of the society within the system would hold such beliefs as they do in fact hold. And a belief system is logical if, once you identify the premises or assumptions upon which the system is based, individual beliefs would follow from them and can be deduced from them alone.[331]

---

**[329] Mounce, H. O. 1973. "Understanding a primitive society."** ***Philosophy: the journal of the Royal Institute of Philosophy*****. Vol. 48, No. 180. October 1973. 347.**

**[330] Ibid. 348.**

**[331] Bodunrin, 1981. 170.**

Victor Ocaya in his "Logic in the Acholi Language" argued that the Acholi language, spoken in Uganda, "has all the elements sufficient for the business of logic."[332] Because of the affinity between Acholi and a number of other Luo languages in Uganda, the Sudan, Kenya and Tanzania, what holds for Acholi, as far as the logicality of its linguistic structure is concerned, might also be said to hold for those other languages.

It has to be pointed out that attempts to transpose Western, formal logic into an African language structure is likely to fail woefully. For one thing, it is likely to suffer a fundamental inadequacy in word-for-word translations. For another, language structures often play important roles in the analysis of a logical proposition. How, for instance, does one identify a copula in a language in which a 'copula' is embedded in either the subject or the object?[333] But even if we succeed in making a complete transposition, how African would the resultant work be?

It is sufficient to accept that any sane African would affirm that a thing is what it is, and not something else (the law of identity); that it is impossible for a thing to be and not be at the same time (law of contradiction); and that a thing either is or is not – there being no middle ground (law of excluded middle). And if that is the case, then the myth of Africans being illogical or pre-logical has been exposed for the self-seeking hoax that it is.

## 4.0: Conclusion

This Unit has examined the sub-disciplinary aspects of African philosophy, paying attention to African metaphysics, considered to be the heart of African philosophy; African epistemology in which it is shown that how something is known is, among other things, a function of how one relates with the entirety of reality; African ethics, whose distinctive feature is its attention to communal good; and African logic, by which we know that it is an exploitative excuse to claim that Africans are pre-logical.

## 5.0: Summary

In this unit, the following points have been made:

- that there are African philosophy equivalents of the more general branches of philosophy;
- that each of these branches has points of convergence and divergence from their equivalents in 'mainstream philosophy'.

## 6.0: Self-Assessment Exercise

- What is African metaphysics?
- What is the connection between epistemology and ethics (or morality) and between morality and ontology in African philosophy?
- Is there a distinctive African mode of thinking that makes it illogical?

## 7.0: References/Further Reading

---

**[332] Ocaya, V. 2004. "Logic in Acholi language." Wiredu, K. (ed.). *A Companion to African philosophy.* Malden: Blackwell Publishing. 285.**

**[333] Ocaya, for instance, points out that there is no copula in Acholi language See Ocaya, 2004. 286.**

Bewaji, J. I. A. 2004. “Ethics and Morality in Yoruba Culture.” Wiredu, K. (ed.). *A Companion to African Philosophy.* Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
Bodunrin, P. O. 1981. “The Question of African Philosophy”. *Philosophy, 56. 12.* 161-179.
Hallen, B. 2004. “Yoruba moral epistemology.” Wiredu, K. (ed.). *A companion to African philosophy,* Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
Hallen, B and Sodipo, J. O. 1997. *Knowledge, Belief and Witchcraft,* Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Idowu, E. B. 1973. *African Traditional Religion: A Definition,* London: SCM Ltd.
Mbiti, J. S. 1991. *African Religions and Philosophy* (Second Edition), London: Heinemann.
Mounce, H. O. “Understanding a primitive society.” *Philosophy: the journal of the Royal Institute of Philosophy*. Vol. 48, No. 180. October 1973.
Mudimbe, V. Y. 1986. “On the question of an African philosophy: the case of French speaking Africa.” Mowoe, I. J. and Bjornson, R. (eds.) *Africa and the West: legacies of an empire,* New York: Greenwood Press.
Ocaya, V. 2004. “Logic in Acholi language.” Wiredu, K. (ed.). *A Companion to African philosophy.* Malden: Blackwell Publishing. 285-295.
Tempels, P. 1959. *Bantu Philosophy.* Paris: Presence Africaine.
Ukpokolo, I. E. 2017. “Introduction: The Shifting Focus of Philosophy in Africa.” Ukpokolo, Isaac E. (ed.). *Issues, Themes and Problems in African Philosophy,* Switzerland: Palmgrave Macmillan.
Velkley, R. 2000. “What is Metaphysics?” Rosen Stanley (ed.), *The Philosopher’s Handbook,* New York: Random House.
Wiredu, K. 2004. “Introduction: African Philosophy in our Time”, Wiredu, K. (ed.). *A Companion to African Philosophy.* Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
--------- 2003 “The moral foundations of an African culture”. Coetzee and Roux (eds.) *The African Philosophy Reader.*
-------- (1995). “Custom and Morality: A Comparative Analysis of some African and Western Conceptions of Morals.” *Conceptual Decolonisation in African Philosophy* (selected and introduced by Olusegun Oladipo), Ibadan: Hope Publications.

# Module 6: Other Philosophical Traditions

Unit 1: Western Philosophical Tradition I
Unit 2: Western Philosophical Tradition II
Unit 3: Eastern (Asian) Philosophical Tradition I
Unit 4: Eastern (Asian) Philosophical Tradition II

## UNIT 1: WESTERN PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION I: ANCIENT, MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN PERIODS

8.0 Introduction
9.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)
10.0 Main Content
- 10.1 Ancient and Medieval Western Philosophical Tradition
  - 10.1.1 The Tradition of System-building
- 3.2 Early Modern Western Philosophical Tradition
  - 3.2.1 Analytic Philosophy

## 1.0 Introduction

Welcome to this lecture on western philosophical traditions. In this topic, you would be introduced to some of the major traditions of western extraction that have dominated the discipline of philosophy. Of course, there are other traditions such as the African, Asian and Middle Eastern (Islamic philosophical tradition): some of which would be examined in latter units. Our focus on Western philosophy in this unit would cover particularly the ancient, medieval and early modern periods. The contents of this unit will be examined in the following headings: (i) Western philosophical tradition in the ancient and medieval periods, which essentially examines the method of system-building among the philosophers of the periods; and (ii) Western philosophical traditions in early modern period, which further divides into Analytic and language philosophy. In examining these aspects of the tradition of Western philosophy it is important to note that each of these sub-areas of philosophy is neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive.

## 2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- describe Western philosophical tradition
- explain key concepts in Western philosophical tradition
- identify essential characteristics of Western philosophical tradition

## 3.0 Main Content

### 3.1 Ancient and Medieval Western Philosophical Traditions

Historically, the term, Western philosophy, refers to the philosophical thought and work associated with Western culture, particularly beginning with Greek philosophy of the pre-Socratics such as Thales (c. 624 – c. 546 BC) and Pythagoras (c. 570 – c. 495 BC), and eventually covering a large area of the world.[334] Recall that the word, 'philosophy' itself originated from the Ancient Greek expression, *philosophía* (φιλοσοφία), which literally translates as "the love of wisdom." This comes however from two Greek words *phileîn*

[334] Anthony Kenny, *A New History of Western Philosophy*, (Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 19.

(φιλεῖν) "to love" and *sophia* (σοφία), "wisdom". Western philosophy has often been divided into some major branches, or schools, based either on the questions typically addressed by people working in different parts of the field, or based on notions of ideological undercurrents. In the ancient world of the West, the most influential division of the subject was the Stoics' division of philosophy into logic, ethics, and physics (conceived as the study of the nature of the world, and including both natural science and metaphysics). In contemporary philosophy, specialties within the field are more commonly divided into metaphysics, epistemology, ethics and aesthetics (the latter two of which together comprise axiology or value theory). Logic is sometimes included as a main branch of philosophy; it is sometimes treated as a separate branch that philosophers happen to work on, and sometimes just as a characteristically philosophical method applying to all branches of philosophy. It would be stated here that philosophy in the medieval period was a further development on the achievements of ancient philosophers and their philosophy, albeit in relation to theological or religious concerns of the time. Indeed, medieval philosophy bequeathed the Modern world with an understanding of the relation between philosophy and theology, between reason and faith. Even within these broad branches, there are numerous sub-disciplines of philosophy during this period such as the analytic philosophy and language philosophy.

### 3.1.1 The Tradition of System-building

The idea of system-building among the ancient and medieval philosophers is that the scope of their philosophical analyses and understanding, as well as the writings of (at least some of) the ancient philosophers are seen to encompass the range of 'all' intellectual endeavours at the time. In the pre-Socratic period, ancient philosophers first articulated questions about the "archḗ" (the cause or first principle of all things) of the universe. Western philosophy is generally said to begin in the Greek cities of Western Asia Minor, or Ionia, with Thales of Miletus, who philosophised around 585 BC and was responsible for the dictum, "all is water." His most noted students were Anaximander, who taught that "all is apeiron", meaning roughly, "the unlimited" and Anaximenes, who claimed that "all is air". Both were from Miletus. Western philosophy at this time also saw the emergence of Pythagoras, who was from the island of Samos, off the coast of Ionia. Pythagoras held that "all is number." By this, he gave a formal (non-material) accounts, in contrast to the previous material account of the Ionians. Pythagoras and his followers, the Pythagoreans, also believed in metempsychosis, which meant the transmigration of souls, or reincarnation. In the philosophers referred to as the pre-Socratics, the tradition of system-building is evident in how they sought to provide an account of the explanation of how individual particular things observed in the world came to be. Indeed, it was such that for them, what was supposed as the primary stuff of all things was supposed to also account for the phenomenon of change, which, at the time, was considered an integral process of all things. So, when Thales, for instance, said "all is water," he also had to say how all came to be through water; that is, he also had to explain how water accounted for the phenomenon of change.

A key figure in ancient Greek philosophy, one that came after other pre-Socratic philosophers, is Socrates himself. Socrates studied under several Sophists but transformed Greek philosophy into a branch of philosophy that is still pursued today: Ethics or Moral philosophy. It is said that following a visit to the Oracle of Delphi, he spent much of his life questioning anyone in Athens who would engage him in order to disprove the oracular prophecy that there would be no man wiser than Socrates.[335] Socrates used a critical approach called the "elenchus" or Socratic method to examine people's views. He aimed to study human life in relation to the good life, justice, beauty, and virtue. Although Socrates wrote nothing himself, some of his many disciples wrote down his conversations. He was tried for corrupting the youth and impiety by the Greek democratic regime of the time. He was found guilty and sentenced to death. Although his friends offered to help him escape from prison, he chose to remain in Athens and abide by his principles. His execution consisted of drinking the poison hemlock and he died in 399 BC. The method of Socrates was essentially defined by the search for the definitions and meaning of concepts, notions, and ideas. Through Plato, we learn that Socrates was interested in this because he realised that the stable things from which and through which we come to understand the world and our place in it as moral beings is through a correct understanding of these concepts, such as justice, courage, truth, knowledge and so on. In building his system, Socrates insists that an understanding of the concepts by which we guide our daily lives, would help us choose correctly the right course of action.

Plato and Aristotle were the other two of ancient philosophy's most prominent philosophers that make up what is now described as the golden age of Greek philosophy; the first figure in that age being Socrates. Plato was one of the most illustrious students of Socrates. Plato founded the Academy of Athens and wrote a number of dialogues, which applied the Socratic method of inquiry to examine philosophical problems. Some central ideas of Plato's dialogues are the immortality of the soul, the benefits of being just, that evil is ignorance, and, very importantly, the theory of forms. Forms are universal properties that constitute true reality and contrast with the changeable material things he called "becoming". For Plato, the theory of Forms was the basis of all of his philosophy, particularly regarding the true nature of reality as well as the object of knowledge. The Forms were at the center of his explanations regarding the 'Good'. Aristotle, who was a pupil of Plato, and the first to be considered a truly systematic philosopher and scientist, wrote about physics, biology, zoology, metaphysics, aesthetics, poetry, theater, music, rhetoric, politics and logic. Aristotelian logic was the first type of logic to attempt to categorize every valid syllogism. Aristotle tutored Alexander the Great, who in turn conquered much of the ancient world at a rapid pace. Indeed, Hellenization and Aristotelian philosophy exercised considerable influence on almost all subsequent Western and Middle Eastern philosophers, including Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, Western medieval, Jewish and Islamic thinkers. It is pertinent to state here

[335] See, Thomas G. West, *Plato's Apology of Socrates: An Interpretation, with a New Translation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979)

that following Socrates, a variety of schools of thought emerged. In addition to Plato's Academy and Aristotle's Peripatetic school, other schools of thought derived from Socrates included the Academic Sceptics, Cynics, Cyrenaics, and Stoics. In addition, two non-Socratic schools derived from the teachings of Socrates' contemporary, Democritus. These were, Pyrrhonism and Epicureanism.

The tradition of Western philosophy finds its longest period to be what philosopher-historians now refer to as medieval philosophy. But it must be noted here that what is generally regarded as medieval philosophy includes the philosophy of Western Europe and the Middle East during the Middle Ages, roughly extending from the Christianization of the Roman Empire until the Renaissance.[336] Medieval philosophy is defined partly by the rediscovery and further development of early Greek and Hellenistic philosophy, and partly by the need to address theological problems and to integrate the then widespread sacred doctrines of Abrahamic religion (Islam, Judaism, and Christianity) with secular learning. Early medieval philosophy was influenced by the likes of Stoicism, Neoplatonism, but, above all, the philosophy of Plato himself. Some of the problems discussed throughout this period are the relation of faith to reason, the existence and unity of God, the object of theology and metaphysics, the problem of knowledge, the problem of universals, and the problem of individuation. The prominent figure of this period was Augustine of Hippo (one of the most important Church Fathers in Western Christianity) who adopted Plato's thought and Christianized it in the 4th century, and Thomas Aquinas, whose influence dominated medieval philosophy, perhaps, from the 13th century up to end of the period. Whereas it is widely accepted that the philosophy of Augustine was the preferred starting point for most philosophers of medieval period, up until the 13th century, the arrival of Aquinas, who, following Aristotelian philosophy, contributed to the reintroduction of Aristotle's philosophy to the West. These philosophers to be sure developed philosophical systems that were based on a merging of their faith and the philosophical traditions of the ancient Greek philosophers, and were able to attempt the analyses of the questions that caught their attentions in the period.

The decline of Medieval philosophy saw the emergence of what is sometime referred to as the interlude between the Medieval period and the Modern period in the tradition of Western philosophy; that is, the Renaissance. The Renaissance (meaning "rebirth," in this instance the rebirth – rediscovery – of classical texts) was a period of transition between the Middle Ages and modern thought, in which the recovery of classical texts helped shift philosophical interests away from technical studies in logic, metaphysics, and theology towards eclectic inquiries into morality, philology, and mysticism.[337] The study of the classics and the humane arts generally, such as history and literature, enjoyed a scholarly interest hitherto unknown in Christendom, a tendency referred to as humanism.[338] Displacing the medieval interest in metaphysics and logic, the

[336] Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy, Volume II: From Augustine to Scotus* (Burns & Oates, 1950), p. 1,
[337] Brian Copenhaver and Charles Schmitt, *Renaissance Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 4:
[338] Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy, Volume III: From Ockham to Suarez* (The Newman Press, 1953), p. 29:

humanists followed the writer, Petrarch, in making man and his virtues the focus of philosophy.

## 3.2 Early Modern Western Philosophical Traditions

The term "modern philosophy" has multiple usages. For example, Thomas Hobbes is sometimes considered the first modern philosopher because he applied a systematic method to political philosophy. By contrast, however, Rene Descartes is usually regarded as the first modern philosopher because he grounded his philosophy in problems of *knowledge*, rather than problems of metaphysics.[339] Modern philosophy and especially Enlightenment philosophy[340] is distinguished by its increasing independence from traditional authorities such as the Church, academia, and Aristotelianism;[341] and a turn to the foundations of knowledge and metaphysical system-building;[342] and the emergence of modern physics out of natural philosophy.[343] Some central topics of the tradition of Western philosophy in its early modern (also classical modern – 17th and 18th centuries) period include the nature of the mind and its relation to the body, the implications of the new natural sciences for traditional theological topics such as free will and God, and the emergence of a secular basis for moral and political philosophy.[344] These trends first distinctively coalesce in the philosophy of Francis Bacon, who called for a new, empirical program for expanding knowledge, and soon found massively influential form in the mechanical physics and rationalist metaphysics of Rene Descartes.[345] Other notable modern philosophers include Baruch Spinoza, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, John Locke, Bishop George Berkeley, David Hume and Immanuel Kant.[346] The approximate end of the early modern period is most often identified with Immanuel Kant's systematic attempt to limit metaphysics, justify scientific knowledge, and reconcile both of these with morality and freedom.[347]

The latter part of this period which saw the birth of late modern philosophy is usually considered to begin around the year, 1781, when Gotthold Ephraim Lessing died and Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* appeared in print.[348] German philosophy exercised broad influence in this century, owing in part to the dominance of the German university system.[349] German idealists, such as Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and the members of Jena

[339] *Diane Collinson (1987). Fifty Major Philosophers: A Reference Guide. p. 125.*
[340] Donald Rutherford, *The Cambridge Companion to Early Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. xiii,
[341] Anthony Kenny, *A New History of Western Philosophy*, vol. 3 (Oxford University Press, 2006), p. xii:
[342] Donald Rutherford, *The Cambridge Companion to Early Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 1.
[343] Anthony Kenny, *A New History of Western Philosophy*, vol. 3, pp. 179-180:
[344] Anthony Kenny, *A New History of Western Philosophy*, vol. 3, pp. 212-331.
[345] Nadler, *A Companion to Early Modern Philosophy*, pp. 2-3:
[346] Donald Rutherford, *The Cambridge Companion to Early Modern Philosophy*, p. 1:
[347] Anthony Kenny, *A New History of Western Philosophy*, vol. 3, p. xiii.
[348] Karl Ameriks, *Kant's Elliptical Path* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 307.
[349] Baldwin, *Western Philosophy*, (2003), p. 4.

Romanticism, Friedrich Holderlin, Novalis, and Karl Wilhelm Schlegel, transformed the work of Immanuel Kant by maintaining that the world is constituted by a rational or mind-like process, and as such is entirely knowable.[350] Arthur Schopenhauer's identification of this world-constituting process as an irrational 'will to live' influenced later 19th- and early 20th-century thinking, such as the work of Friedrich Nietzsche. The 19th century took the radical notions of self-organization and intrinsic order from Goethe and Kantian metaphysics, and proceeded to produce a long elaboration on the tension between systematization (or system-building) and organic development (analysis by piece-meal). Foremost was the work of Hegel, whose *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) and *Science of Logic* (1813–1816) produced a "dialectical" framework for ordering of knowledge. As with the 18th century, developments in science arose from philosophy and also challenged philosophy: most importantly the work of Charles Darwin, which was based on the idea of organic self-regulation found in philosophers such as Smith, but fundamentally challenged established conceptions.

After Hegel's death in 1831, 19th-century philosophy largely turned against idealism in favor of varieties of philosophical naturalism, such as the positivism of Auguste Comte, the empiricism of John Stuart Mill, and the historical materialism of Karl Marx. Logic began a period of its most significant advances since the inception of the discipline, as increasing mathematical precision opened entire fields of inference to formalization in the work of George Boole and Gottlob Frege.[351] Indeed, philosophers who initiated lines of thought that would continue to shape philosophy into the 20th century include: (i) Gottlob Frege and Henry Sidgwick, whose work in logic and ethics, respectively, provided the tools for early analytic philosophy; (ii) Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, who laid the groundwork for existentialism and post-Structuralism.

### 3.2.1 Analytic Philosophy

Since the end of the Second World War, 20th century philosophy has been divided mostly into analytic and continental philosophical traditions; the former has been carried out in the English-speaking world and the latter on the continent of Europe. The perceived conflict between continental and analytic schools of philosophy remains prominent, though there is an increasing skepticism regarding the distinction between the two traditions. The basis for this is that 20th century philosophy is marked by a certain readiness for a series of attempts to reform and preserve, as well as to alter older knowledge systems by the application of methods, and beginning with assumptions that are diverse in perspectives. This, in part, was necessitated by the upheavals produced by a sequence of conflicts within philosophical discourse over the basis of knowledge. This led to the overthrow of classical certainties regarding knowledge.

To the extent that the methods and assumptions that motivated the concerns in the early 20th century were diverse, a distinction between the analytic and the continental

[350] Frederick C. Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism, 1781–1801* (USA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. viii.
[351] Baldwin 2003, p. 119:

traditions is discernable. Seminal figures in the tradition of analytic philosophy include Bertrand Russell, Ludwig Wittgenstein, while those in the continental tradition include Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Jean-Paul Sartre. It is pertinent to state here that the traditions of analytic and continental philosophies do not represent exclusive approaches and methods in the Western tradition of philosophy. In this vein, for instance, the publication of Husserl's *Logical Investigations* (1900-1901) and Russell's *The Principles of Mathematics* (1903) is taken to have marked the beginning of 20th-century analytic philosophy.

In the English-speaking world, analytic philosophy became the dominant school for much of the 20th century. The term "analytic philosophy" roughly designates a group of philosophical methods that stress detailed argumentation, attention to semantics, use of classical logic and non-classical logics and clarity of meaning above all other criteria. Though the movement has broadened, it was a cohesive school in the first half of the century. Analytic philosophers were shaped strongly by logical positivism, united by the notion that philosophical problems could and should be solved by attention to logic and language. Bertrand Russell and G. E. Moore are also often regarded as founders of analytic philosophy, beginning with their rejection of British idealism, their defense of realism and the emphasis they laid on the legitimacy of analysis. Russell's classic works, *The Principles of Mathematics*, *On Denoting*, and *Principia Mathematica* (with Alfred North Whitehead), aside from greatly promoting the use of mathematical logic in philosophy, set the ground for much of the research program in the early stages of the analytic tradition, emphasizing such problems as: the reference of proper names, whether 'existence' is a property, the nature of propositions, the analysis of definite descriptions, and discussions on the foundations of mathematics. These works also explored issues of ontological commitment and metaphysical problems regarding time, the nature of matter, mind, persistence and change, which Russell often tackled with the aid of mathematical logic.

### 3.2.2 Language Philosophy

According to Michael Dummett in *Origins of Analytical Philosophy*, published in 1993, Gottlob Frege's *Foundations of Arithmetic* (1884) was the first analytic work. In this way, Frege took what is now referred to as the "the linguistic turn," by analyzing philosophical problems through language. The assumption here follows the claim of some analytic philosophers who hold that philosophical problems arise through misuse of language or because of misunderstandings of the logic of human language. In 1921, Ludwig Wittgenstein, who studied under Russell at Cambridge, published his *Tractatuc Logico-Philosophicus*, which offered a rigidly "logical" account of linguistic and philosophical issues. He proposed the picture theory of meaning by which he claimed that the meaning use of language is when language is used to mirror reality in the same way a picture represents what it is it pictures. Years later, Wittgenstein reversed a number of the positions he set out in the *Tractatus*, in his second major work, *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). The *Investigations* was one of the works that was

influential in the development of "ordinary language philosophy," which was promoted by, especially two other philosophers, Gilbert Ryle and J.L. Austin.

Though geographically the United States is not part of Western Europe, culturally some of its philosophy is considered in the tradition of Western philosophy. It is in this vein that the philosophy of Willard Van Orman Quine, who was at the time in the United States, is considered to have had major influence in the development of analytic philosophy, with the paper "Two Dogmas of Empiricism". In that paper, Quine criticized the distinction between analytic and synthetic statements, arguing that a clear conception of analyticity is unattainable. Notable students of Quine include the American philosophers, Donald Davison and Daniel Dennet. It is instructive to state here that the later work of Bertrand Russell and the philosophy of Willard Van Orman Quine are influential exemplars of the naturalist approach dominant in the second half of the 20th century. But the diversity of analytic philosophy from the 1970s onward defies easy generalization: the naturalism of Quine was in some precincts superseded by a "new metaphysics" of possible worlds, as in the influential work of David Lewis. More recently, the experimental philosophy movement has sought to reappraise philosophical problems through social science research techniques. Some influential figures in contemporary analytic philosophy are: Timothy Williamson, David Lewis, John Searle, Thomas Nagel, Hilary Putnam, Michael Dummett, John McDowell, Saul Kripke, Peter van Inwagen, and Paul and Patricia Churchland.

From the view of analytic philosophers, Philosophy is done primarily through self-reflection and critical thinking. It does not tend to rely on experiment. However, in some ways philosophy is close to science in its character and method. Some analytic philosophers have suggested that the method of philosophical analysis allows philosophers to emulate the methods of natural science. Quine holds that philosophy does no more than clarify the arguments and claims of other sciences. This suggests that philosophy might be the study of meaning and reasoning generally; but some still would claim either that this is not a science, or that if it is it ought not to be pursued by philosophers. Analytic philosophy has sometimes been accused of not contributing to the political debate or to traditional questions in aesthetics. However, with the appearance of *A Theory of Justice* by John Rawls and *Anarchy, State and Utopia* by Robert Nozick, analytic political philosophy acquired respectability. Analytic philosophers have also shown depth in their investigations of aesthetics, with Roger Scruton, Nelson Goodman, Arthur Danto and others, developing the subject to its current shape.

## 4.0 Conclusion

Western philosophy has often been divided into some major branches, or schools, based either on the questions typically addressed by people working in different parts of the field, or based on notions of ideological undercurrents. All of these branches or schools make up the major traditions that have impacted the discipline of philosophy.

## 5.0 Summary

So far in this unit, we have examined some of the major traditions of western extraction that has dominated the discipline of philosophy. To this end, we examined the ancient and medieval periods, most especially the method of system-building among the philosophers of the periods. We also examined some Western philosophical traditions in early modern period, such as Analytic and language philosophy. In examining these aspects of the tradition of Western philosophy, we explained that each of these sub-areas of philosophy is neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive.

## 6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

- Briefly discuss the of Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes as major figures in the ancient period of western philosophy
- In what way(s) did Socrates, Plato and Aristotle contribute to the development of modern day philosophy?
- Write short notes on the following schools of philosophy:
  i. Analytic school
  ii. Language school

## 7.0 References/Further Reading


Nadler Steven, *A Companion to Early Modern Philosophy*, (USA: Blackwell, 2002).

Donald Rutherford, *The Cambridge Companion to Early Modern Philosophy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, (Great Britain: Search Press Limited, 1950).

Diane Collinson, *Fifty Major Philosophers: A Reference Guide*, (London: Routlegde, 1988).

Onyewuenyi, I. C. *The African Origin of Greek Philosophy, An Exercise in Afrocentricism*, ( Nsukka: University of Nigeria Press, 1993).

Stace, W. T. *A Critical History of Greek Philosophy*, (New York: Macmillan, 1969).

Cairns, H. and Hamilton, E. (Eds.) *Introduction to the Collected Dialogues of Plato*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1966).

Thomas G. West, *Plato's Apology of Socrates: An Interpretation, with a New Translation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1979)

Anthony Kenny, *A New History of Western Philosophy*, (USA: Oxford University Press, 2012).

## UNIT TWO: WESTERN PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION II: RECENT MODERN AND EARLY CONTEMPORARY PERIODS



### 1.0 Introduction

Welcome to this lecture on Western philosophical tradition in the recent modern and early contemporary periods. In this topic, you would be introduced to continental philosophy where we will discuss such philosophical traditions like Existentialism, German Idealism, Phenomenology, Structuralism and Post-structuralism.

### 2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- describe Western philosophical tradition in the recent modern and early contemporary periods
- discuss the views of some major existentialist philosophers
- identify essential characteristics of Western philosophy during this period

### 3.0 Main Content

### 3.1 Continental Philosophy

Continental philosophy is a set of 19th- and 20th-century philosophical traditions from mainland Europe. Major 20th-century continental philosophical movements include German idealism, phenomenology, existentialism, hermeneutics, critical theory, structuralism, and post-structuralism. While identifying any non-trivial common factor in all these schools of thought is bound to be controversial, Michael E. Rosen has hypothesized a few common continental themes identifiable with all these movements. These include that the natural sciences cannot replace the human sciences; that the thinker is affected by the conditions of experience (one's place and time in history); that

philosophy is both theoretical and practical; that meta-philosophy or reflection upon the methods and nature of philosophy itself is an important part of philosophy proper.

The founder of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl, sought to study consciousness as experienced from a first-person perspective, while Martin Heidegger drew on the ideas of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Husserl to propose an unconventional existential approach to ontology. In the works Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau Ponty, and Albert Camus, developed a metaphysics undergirded by phenomenological analysis. Post-structuralism was developed by writers such as Gilles Deleuze, Jean-Francois Lyotard, who is best known for his articulation of postmodernism, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, who are best known for developing a form of semiotic analysis known as deconstruction. Furthermore, the psychoanalytic work of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva, and others has also been influential in contemporary continental thought. Conversely, some philosophers have attempted to define and rehabilitate older traditions of philosophy. Most notably, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Alasdair McIntyre have both, albeit in different ways, revived the tradition of Aristotelianism. Let us now briefly examine some of these philosophical schools and movements of this era.

### 3.1.1 Existentialism

Existentialism is a term applied to the work of a number of late 19th- and 20th-century philosophers who, despite profound doctrinal differences,[352] shared the belief that philosophical thinking begins with the human subject – not merely the thinking subject, but the acting, feeling, living human individual.[353] In existentialism, the individual's starting point is characterized by what has been called "the existential attitude" or a sense of disorientation and confusion in the face of an apparently meaningless or absurd world.[354] Many existentialists have also regarded traditional systematic or academic philosophy, in both style and content, as too abstract and remote from concrete human experience.[355] Although they did not use the term, the 19th-century philosophers Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche are widely regarded as the fathers of existentialism. Their influence, however, extended beyond existentialist thought.[356]

### 3.1.2 German Idealism

Transcendental idealism, advocated by Immanuel Kant, is the view that there are limits on what can be understood, since there is much that cannot be brought under the conditions of objective judgment. Kant wrote his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781–1787) in an attempt to reconcile the conflicting approaches of rationalism and empiricism, and

[352] John Macquarrie, *Existentialism* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972), p. 18-21.
[353] John Macquarrie, *Existentialism*, pp. 14-15.
[354] Robert C. Solomon, *Existentialism* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), pp. 1-2.
[355] Walter Kaufmann, *Existentialism: From Dostoevesky to Sartre*, New York (1956), page 12
[356] Marin J. Matustik, *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity* (USA: Indiana University Press, 1995), p. 67.

to establish a new groundwork for studying metaphysics. Although Kant held that objective knowledge of the world required the mind to impose a conceptual or categorical framework on the stream of pure sensory data – a framework including space and time themselves – he maintained that *things-in-themselves* existed independently of human perceptions and judgments; he was therefore not an idealist in any simple sense. Kant's account of *things-in-themselves* is both controversial and highly complex. Continuing his work, Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Friedrich Schelling dispensed with belief in the independent existence of the world, and created a thoroughgoing idealist philosophy.

The most notable work of German idealism was G.W.F. Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, of 1807. Hegel admitted his ideas were not new, but that all the previous philosophies had been incomplete. His goal was to correctly finish their job. Hegel asserts that the twin aims of philosophy are to account for the contradictions apparent in human experience (which arise, for instance, out of the supposed contradictions between "being" and "not being"), and also simultaneously to resolve and preserve these contradictions by showing their compatibility at a higher level of examination ("being" and "not being" are resolved with "becoming"). This program of acceptance and reconciliation of contradictions is known as the "Hegelian dialectics".

Philosophers influenced by Hegel include Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach, who coined the term "projection" as pertaining to humans' inability to recognize anything in the external world without projecting qualities of ourselves upon those things; Karl Marx; Friedrich Engels; and the British idealists, notably T.H. Green, J.M.E. McTaggart and F.H. Bradley. Few 20th-century philosophers have embraced idealism. However, quite a few have embraced Hegelian dialectic. Immanuel Kant's "Copernican Turn" also remains an important philosophical concept today.

### 3.1.3 Phenomenology

Edmund Husserl's phenomenology was an ambitious attempt to lay the foundations for an account of the structure of conscious experience in general.[357] An important part of Husserl's phenomenological project was to show that all conscious acts are directed at or about objective content, a feature that Husserl called *intentionality*.[358] Husserl published only a few works in his lifetime, which treat phenomenology mainly in abstract methodological terms; but he left an enormous quantity of unpublished concrete analyses. Husserl's work was immediately influential in Germany, with the foundation of phenomenological schools in Munich and Göttingen. Phenomenology later achieved international fame through the work of such philosophers as Martin Heidegger (formerly Husserl's research assistant), Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Jean-Paul Sartre. Through the work of Heidegger and Sartre, Husserl's focus on subjective experience influenced aspects of existentialism.

[357] David Woodruff Smith, *Husserl* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 43.
[358] See, Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall, *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism* (USA: John Wiley & Sons, 2011).

### 3.1.4 Structuralism and Post-structuralism

Inaugurated by the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, structuralism sought to clarify systems of signs through analyzing the discourses they both limit and make possible. Saussure conceived of the sign as being delimited by all the other signs in the system, and ideas as being incapable of existence prior to linguistic structure, which articulates thought. This led continental thought away from humanism, and toward what was termed the decentering of man: language is no longer spoken by man to express a true inner self, but language speaks man.

Structuralism sought the province of a hard science, but its positivism soon came under fire by post-structuralism, a wide field of thinkers, some of whom were once themselves structuralists, but later came to criticize it. Structuralists believed they could analyze systems from an external, objective standing, for example, but the post-structuralists argued that this is incorrect, that one cannot transcend structures and thus analysis is itself determined by what it examines. While the distinction between the signifier and signified was treated as crystalline by structuralists, post-structuralists asserted that every attempt to grasp the signified results in more signifiers, so meaning is always in a state of being deferred, making an ultimate interpretation impossible. Structuralism came to dominate continental philosophy throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, encompassing thinkers that are as diverse as Claude Levi-Strauss, Roland Barthes and Jacques Lacan. Post-structuralism came to dominate from the 1970s onwards, and included thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and even Roland Barthes; it incorporated a critique of structuralism's limitations.

## 4.0 Conclusion

The unit has focussed on providing a historical analysis of the philosophical traditions that dominated the recent modern and early contemporary periods in the west. It should be noted here that these traditions were conceived to explicate the world or aspects of the world and their discussion in this unit was to show the way the discipline of philosophy has developed through history, particularly in the West.

## 5.0 Summary

The unit was meant to further introduce the student to the historical traditions of philosophy in the West, especially during the latter part of the modern period and the early part of the contemporary period. The student was taken through the various schools or movements of continental philosophy such as Existentialism, German Idealism, Phenomenology, Structuralism and Post-structuralism. This period however showed a difference both in the subject of philosophical engagement as well as the approach employed by philosophers of this era. As we saw, modern philosophers of his era were more interested in providing piece-meal analyses that focus on aspects of the world; an approach that has continued till the present.

## 6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

- what is continental philosophy? Name five major figures of this era
- discuss the views of two existentialist philosophers
- write short notes on the following philosophical movements or schools of thought:
  i. Existentialism
  ii. Idealism
  iii. Phenomenology
  iv. Structuralism and
  v. Post-structuralism

## 7.0 References/Further Reading


David Woodruff Smith,(2007) *Husserl*, London: Routledge.

Hubert L. Dreyfus and Mark A. Wrathall, (2011) *A Companion to Phenomenology and Existentialism* (USA: John Wiley & Sons.

John Macquarrie, (1972) *Existentialism* New York: McGraw-Hill,.

Robert C. Solomon, (1974) *Existentialism* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Marin J. Matustik, (1995) *Kierkegaard in Post/Modernity* USA: Indiana University Press.

Nadler Steven, (2002) *A Companion to Early Modern Philosophy*, (USA: Blackwell.

Donald Rutherford, (2006) *The Cambridge Companion to Early Modern Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Anthony Kenny, (2012) *A New History of Western Philosophy*, USA: Oxford University Press.

Karl Ameriks, (2002) *Kant's Elliptical Path*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Baldwin, (2003) *Western Philosophy*.

Frederick C. (2002) Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism, 1781–1801* USA: Harvard University Press.

Brian Copenhaver and Charles Schmitt, (1992) *Renaissance Philosophy* Oxford University Press.

Frederick Copleston, (1950) *A History of Philosophy*, Great Britain: Search Press Limited.

Diane Collinson, (1988) *Fifty Major Philosophers: A Reference Guide*, London: Routlegde.

Donald Rutherford, (2006) *The Cambridge Companion to Early Modern Philosophy* Cambridge University Press.

Anthony Kenny, *A New History of Western Philosophy*, (Oxford University Press, 2006).

Thomas G. West, (1979) *Plato's Apology of Socrates: An Interpretation, with a New Translation* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

## UNIT 3: EASTERN (ASIAN) PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION I



### 1.0 Introduction

Welcome to this unit on Asian philosophical tradition I. The content of this unit will be discussed under two major eastern philosophies: the Hindu philosophy and the Buddhist philosophy. It is interesting to note that at the time that ancient Greek philosophy was blossoming on the other side of the world, a different set of philosophical traditions emerged within the Eastern Asian regions of India and China. Like Greece, both of these areas had complex social structures, sophisticated cultures, and, most importantly, systems of writing that enabled people to record their thoughts. But unlike Greek philosophy which was largely secular, Eastern philosophies were intimately tied to their local religious traditions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Daoism. The first two traditions will be discussed in this unit while next and final unit will be devoted to the last two traditions.

### 2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- describe Eastern philosophical tradition
- explain key concepts in Eastern philosophical tradition
- identify essential characteristics of Hindu and Buddhist philosophy

### 3.0 Main Content

### 3.1 Hindu Philosophy

The best place to begin examining Eastern Philosophy is by looking at Hinduism. Hindu texts are among the oldest in the East, and their concepts directly or indirectly influenced the philosophy of other Eastern philosophical traditions. While many of the world's religious traditions were founded by renowned people – Buddha, Jesus, Muhammad – Hinduism has no founding figure, and it covers a diversity of views of the people of India dating as far back as 3,500 BCE. The term "Hindu" comes from the Persian word "Hind,"

which represents the name given to the Indus River region of northern India. Most generally, "Hinduism" means the religion of the Indus River region. Early Hindu religion was polytheistic, similar to the religion in ancient Greece and Rome. Their sacred text is a large work called the *Vedas*, which literally means "bodies of knowledge," written between 1,500-800 BCE in the ancient language Sanskrit. It describes features of various gods, rituals to appease them, and hymns to chant to them. Hindu philosophical discussions emerged shortly after, from around 800 BCE to 200 CE., emphasizing the pantheistic notion of the divine reality that permeates the cosmos. The Hindu name for this reality is the *Atman-Brahman*, literally meaning the *Self-God*, and much of Hindu philosophy focuses on this concept.

The dramatic implication of the notion of the Self-God is that *I am the God of the cosmos*. This requires some explanation, and classical Hindu philosophers were prepared to provide it. The *Atman* is our *true* Self that lies at the inner core of our human identities, and it is only this inner core that is identical with God. Hindus sometimes use an analogy of an onion to describe the various layers of our identities. Like an onion with many layers of skin, our human identities also have different layers. The outer layers of our identities involve common sense views of ourselves that we experience empirically, such as our individual physical bodies, sensations, thoughts and feelings. The Self-God is like the inner core of the onion, hidden beneath many distracting layers, and consequently we fail to immediately comprehend the very existence of that inner core and our divine status. Instead, we see ourselves as distinct beings – each of us with our own bodies and minds – and we see the world itself as consisting of a multiplicity of isolated parts. By peeling away the outer layers of our identities, we will find the Self-God within each of us and see the underlying unity of the world.

The doctrine of the Self-God was put forward in two specific Hindu works: *The Upanishads* and *The Bhagavad Gita*. The *Upanishads* is actually a series of more than 200 anonymously-written texts, although Hindu tradition gives special emphasis to only about 18 early ones composed between 600 and 400 BCE. In one of the most famous of these, a father picturesquely describes to his son how things that seem diverse in fact have an underlying reality. Plants, animals, humans, and everything else are united in the Self-God that exists beneath the physical structure of things. Take, for example, how bees collect juices from a variety of trees and unify those juices in their honey:

> Bees make honey by collecting the juices of distant trees and reducing the juices into one form. These juices have no discrimination and do not say "I am the juice of this tree or that tree." In the same manner, when all these creatures merge with Being [either in deep sleep or in death], they do not know that they merged with Being. Whatever these creatures are here – whether a lion, a wolf, a boar, a worm, a fly, a gnat, or a mosquito – they become that again and again. Everything that exists has as its soul

> that which is the finest essence. It is Reality. It is the Atman, and *you are that*, my son.1.[359]

This passage makes a distinction between our physical identities and our underlying true identities. Our physical identities go through continual cycles of reincarnation; this is so of animal life as well as human life. Our true underlying identities, though, merge with God, which is undifferentiated reality. The father says to his son, "You are that," meaning that his son is the Self-God that he is describing.

The *Bhagavad Gita*, or *Song of God*, is a 100-page section of an epic poem called the *Mahabharata*. At about 5,000 pages and composed over an 800-year period, the *Mahabharata* is the world's longest epic poem. It chronicles a legendary feud between two branches of a royal family. The long-standing quarrel culminates in a bloody battle. The story line behind the *Bhagavad Gita* focuses on prince Arjuna, the leader on one side of the feud, who is despairing about going into battle against his kinfolk. He expresses his grief to his charioteer, Krishna, who, it turns out, is the manifestation of the Hindu god Vishnu in human form. Krishna comforts Arjuna with a philosophy lesson about discovering the Self-God:

> Those who distinguish between the slayer and the slain are ignorant of them both. No one slays, and no one is slain. No one is born, and no one dies. No one who once existed ceases to exist. They are unborn, perpetual, eternal and ancient, and are not slain when their bodies are slaughtered. If we understand a person to be indestructible, perpetual, unborn, undiminishing, how can that person slay, or be slain?[360]

Krishna's point is that we are all eternal by virtu e of the Self-God within us, and what happens to our bodies is insignificant. For this reason, Arjuna should not worry about the conflict with his relatives since even if their bodies die in battle, their inner selves are untouched.

It is one thing for us to theoretically understand the concept of the Self-God, and entirely another for us to discover the Self-God within each of us. To assist believers in this task, Hindu tradition developed a series of yoga techniques. The term "Yoga" literally means "to yoke" or "to harness," and, more generally, it means "discipline". The *Bhagavad Gita* is something like a handbook of the various Yoga methods, and we will look at its account of two of them. The first of these is the Yoga of selfless action (*karma*), which involves routinely behaving with indifference to the fruits of our actions. By engaging in pure action, unconcerned with the action's results, we distance ourselves from the outer layers of our identities and our perceptions of the world. We thus become more sensitive to the reality of the Self-God.

---

[359] Robert Hume, Chandogya Upanishads, Oxford: Oxford University Press

[360] Bhagavad Gita, Sect. 2.

According to the *Bhagavad Gita*, we will not reach this degree of indifference in our actions by following traditional customs in the scriptures: "Scriptures prescribe many ceremonies to attain pleasure and power, but rebirth is the fruit of those actions" (ibid). Like eating a meal, we perform religious rituals for a purpose; in this case, the purpose is to appease God or to get to heaven. However, religious actions are no less distracting than any other action. There are clear psychological indicators when we disassociate ourselves from our actions, namely, we are freed from all emotions and attachments. As such, a second type of Yoga discussed in the *Bhagavad Gita* is that of *meditation*, which involves immediately experiencing our union with God through contemplation. The practice of meditation requires a disciplined effort, and to that end the *Bhagavad Gita* provides step-by-step instructions. When attempting meditation, we should first find a private spot, assume a seated posture, gaze ahead, subdue our thoughts and senses, and lose self-consciousness. Through this method, we directly experience the unified Self-God within us. The point of all these steps in the meditative process is to block out distractions.

Hindus have a long tradition of belief in reincarnation, which, most simply, is the view that one's present life is followed by a series of new lives in new physical bodies. There are two components to rebirth. First, there is the basic process of rebirth itself: when I die, my true Self will be reborn into another body, and when that body dies, I will be reborn into another, and so on. The *Bhagavad Gita* picturesquely states, "As a person throws off worn-out garments and takes new ones, so too the dweller in the body throws off worn-out bodies and enters into others that are new".[361] Some Hindu writings are explicit about the mechanics of the rebirth process. When I die, and my body is cremated, my soul rises with the smoke and travels through the heavens for several months. My soul then falls back to earth, mixes with natural elements, and is consumed by humans. From there my soul works its way into a man's semen, and, through intercourse, enters a woman's womb.

The second component of rebirth is that the moral consequences of my behaviour in this life are carried over to my next lives. Known as the doctrine of *karma*, or *action*, the quality of my existence in my new life is largely a function of my good or bad actions in my present and previous lives. To illustrate, imagine that my true Self carries around a karma pouch from one life to another. Each time I perform a good deed, a good-karma token is tossed into the pouch, and when I perform a bad deed, a bad-karma token is thrown in. When I die, I carry the karma pouch and all of its tokens on to the next life. If I have an abundance of good-karma tokens, then in my next life I may be healthier, wealthier, and more spiritually mature than I am now. On the other hand, if I die with an abundance of bad-karma tokens, then I may be reborn sickly, poor, and ignorant. To make my next lives better, I should do what I can to accumulate as many good-karma tokens as I can.

In the Hindu tradition, reincarnation is thought of as a good thing; it is something that should be dreaded. We need to do what we can to become *released* (*moksha*) from

[361] Bhagavad Gita, Sect. 2.

the rebirth cycle. Hindu writings stress several approaches to release, two of which are especially dominant. One approach is that release is a matter of accumulating a great abundance of good karma over our various lives. When I get as good as I can possibly be, then the rebirth process is over and my true Self remains with God. The appeal of this approach is that it underscores the fact that life is a moral journey, with perfection as our ultimate goal. The other approach to release involves discovering the Self-God within me through disciplined reflection and meditation. The appeal of this approach is that I can go more directly towards my final goal and experience the pure Self-God right *here and now*. Both of these approaches, though, are interconnected.

## 3.2 Buddhist Philosophy

Buddhism was founded in India by a former Hindu monk named Gautama Siddhartha (563-483 BCE), better known as *Buddha*, a term which means the "enlightened one." Buddha came from a wealthy family in what is now the country of Nepal, where his father was a feudal lord. The night before he was born his mother dreamed that a white elephant entered her womb through her side. Hindu priests interpreted the dream as a dual destiny: he would either be a universal monarch, or universal teacher. Hoping that his son would take the path of a monarch, his father confined him to the family estate, sheltering him from the ugly experiences of illness and death. At age 29, he had three occasions to glimpse the outside world, and each time he was shocked to learn about the suffering that humans experience. First he saw an old man, then a sick man, and then a dead body. On a fourth occasion he saw a Hindu monk, which inspired him to leave his family estate to pursue a life of religious devotion. Buddha wandered for six years, learning what he could from holy people about the solution to the human predicament. He joined a band of five ascetic monks who taught him the practice of self-renunciation. So austere were Buddha's efforts, though, that he almost died of starvation. He started eating again to regain health, and his ascetic colleagues left him in disgust. Disheartened by his failures, Buddha sat under a fig tree, vowing to not rise until he achieved supreme awakening. He stayed up all night, and at the first glimpse of the morning star he became enlightened. He eventually drew a large crowd of followers and set up monasteries in every major city. Buddha eventually died by accidentally eating poisoned mushrooms at the home of a close disciple.

Through his early experiences as a monk, Buddha became dissatisfied with many traditional Hindu teachings, such as the role of the priests and the authority of their scriptures. Nevertheless, Buddha's underlying philosophy draws heavily from Hinduism, and one contemporary scholar has gone so far as to say that Buddhism is Hinduism stripped for export. Buddha himself wrote nothing, and the oldest accounts of his teachings are in a voluminous collection called the *Pali Canon*,[362] compiled during the

[362] The Pali Canon is the standard collection of scriptures in the Theravada Buddhist tradition as preserved in the Pali language

first five centuries after Buddha's death. The texts are written in a language related to Sanskrit, called "Pali", hence the designation "*Pali Canon*."

The most famous part of the *Pali Canon* is a section known as "The First Discourse," which, according to tradition, Buddha delivered to his ascetic friends immediately after his enlightenment. The content of the discourse is the foundation of all Buddhist teaching. The discourse presents "four noble truths" concerning the quest for enlightenment. The first truth is that life is *suffering*:

> Now this is the noble truth concerning suffering. Birth is attended with pain, decay is painful, disease is painful, and death is painful. Union with the unpleasant is painful, and separation from the pleasant is painful. Any craving that is unsatisfied is also painful. In brief, the five components which spring from attachment are painful. This then is the noble truth concerning suffering.[363]

The Pali word for suffering is sometimes translated as *anxiety* or *frustration*, but a good description is *dislocation*. For example, the pain that I experience from a dislocated shoulder is the result of my arm being yanked out of its normal position. Similarly, the root of all suffering involves some twisting or distortion of our true nature. A poignant illustration of suffering is the birth process. From the moment we come into the world as infants, we find suffering. With each contraction the mother is gripped with perhaps the greatest physical pain that she will experience in life, while anxious friends and relatives stand by helplessly. Physically contorted as it emerges, the baby is forced to cry so that it may begin breathing. Once giving birth, the mother remains in pain for some time, and the frail baby requires continual monitoring at the risk of dying. Buddhist writings offer an endless list of suffering that we experience throughout our lives, such as that from sickness, old age, fear of death, failure to fulfil ambitions, separation from loved ones, and association with people we dislike. Even on a good day – if we can escape some actual human tragedy – our lives are nevertheless dominated by pre-emptively avoiding suffering. We monitor our diets, struggle to keep up with an exercise routine, cautiously drive around town, lock our doors, and stay clear of hostile people. The second noble truth is that the cause of suffering is *desire*:

> Now this is the noble truth concerning the origin of suffering. It is that thirst or craving which causes the renewal of existence, accompanied by sensual delight, and the seeking of satisfaction first here, then there. That is to say, it is the craving for the gratification of the passions, or the craving for a future life, or the craving for success in this present life. This then is the noble truth concerning the origin of suffering.[364]

[363] See Bhikkhu Sujato's translation of Samyutta Nkaya at www.readingfaithfully.org
[364] Ibid.

The above quote describes desire as an insatiable craving for private fulfilment. We cling or grasp to virtually anything that might satisfy our yearnings, much like a child that jealously clutches a favourite toy. Ultimately, our cravings can never be truly satisfied, and so we suffer – as a child does when we attempt to wrench a toy from his hands. The central point of this noble truth is that for *every* type of suffering we experience, there is some misguided craving that is at its source. Suppose, for example, that my leg gets broken in a car accident on my way to the store. Chronologically, I had several desires that led up to the accident. One desire impelled me to buy a car to begin with, rather than simply to walk everywhere. Another desire inclined me to purchase something that I don't currently own. Yet another desire had me go shopping at that particular time, rather than stay home. And, once I'm at home in my leg cast, lying in bed, my present desires perpetuate my suffering. I want to go back to work, but I can't. I'd like to go to a restaurant, but I can't. I'd prefer to walk around outside but I can't. The more things that I desire and cling to, the more I increase my suffering. Why are we driven to cling so ferociously to so many things? Buddha has an answer. Desire arises from five distinct *components* of our human nature. These components are matter, sensation, perception, predisposition, and consciousness. Each of these five components has me rely on something outside of me. Even if I want to do something as simple as walk from the living room into the kitchen, I rely on the material construction of the house itself, my raw sense perception of it, and how these perceptions automatically register in my mind. Since the human condition is shaped by desire – many if not most of which go unfulfilled – then our condition is one of suffering.

The third noble truth is that the end of suffering is achieved by extinguishing our desire; this is the state of *nirvana*, a term that literally means "to extinguish." Of the virtually endless number of desires that bubble up from my five components, my goal should be the destruction of these, as Buddha describes here:

> Now this is the noble truth concerning the elimination of suffering [i.e., the attainment of nirvana]. It is the destruction of this very thirst, in which no passion remains. It is the laying aside of, the getting rid of, the being free from, and the harbouring no longer of this thirst. This, then, is the noble truth concerning the destruction of suffering.[365]

In this passage Buddha depicts nirvana as a state in which "no passion remains." Most people can understand the task of eliminating *some* desires – such as the desire for unhealthy foods. But the idea here is that we should extinguish *all* desires, and this will bring on a mental state of enlightenment.

Addressing the goal of the third noble truth, the fourth is that nirvana is achieved by adopting a series of moral attitudes, beliefs, and actions, which Buddha collectively

[365] Ibid.

calls the *eightfold path*: "This is the noble truth concerning the *path* that leads to the elimination of suffering. It is the noble eightfold path." Briefly, these are the eight recommendations. (1) We should adopt *right views* that are free from superstition or delusion. (2) We should have *right aims* that are high and worthy of the intelligent and earnest person. (3) We should practice *right speech*, which is kindly, open, and truthful. (4) We should perform *right conduct* that is peaceful, honest, and pure. (5) We should adopt a *right livelihood* that brings no harm or danger to living things. (6) We should put forth the *right effort* in self-training and self-control. (7) We should have r*ight mindfulness* insofar as we are fully aware of the present moment and not preoccupied with hopes or worries. (8) We should engage in *right concentration*, which involves proper meditation that leads to the nirvana experience.

On the surface, the eightfold path endorses many of the values that, since our childhoods, we've been taught to adopt. In fact, these eight recommendations appear integral to simply conducting our normal desire-filled lives in a civilized manner. How, then, do these eight recommendations lead to nirvana, the extinguishing of all desires? Buddha's explanation is that they all involve adopting a *Middle Way*, which is the calm detachment achieved by avoiding the extremes of asceticism and self-indulgence:

> There are two extremes, fellow monks, which a holy person should avoid: the habitual practice of ... self-indulgence, which is vulgar and profitless ... and the habitual practice of self-mortification, which is painful and equally profitless. There is a middle path discovered by the Buddha – a path which opens the eyes and bestows understanding which leads to peace of mind, to the higher wisdom, to full enlightenment, and to Nirvana. Truly, it is the noble eightfold path.[366]

For each of the recommendations in the eightfold path, we can see how we must follow a middle course. For example, with the first path of right aims, I should strive to be free from superstition and delusion. If we look at common superstitions and delusions today, such as belief in alien abduction or racial superiority, these are clearly extremist views that we should steer clear of. This middle course "opens the eyes and bestows understanding," which eventually leads to nirvana. The Middle Path is a stepping-stone towards nirvana insofar as it creates a mental disposition, which in turn enables us to be receptive to the nirvana experience.

## 4.0 Conclusion

While the specific elements of Hindu and Buddhist philosophies differ dramatically, they however have certain affinities in their conception of God and the cosmos, and they are both interested in understanding how God – or an ultimate divine reality – relates to the world.

[366] Ibid

## 5.0 Summary

So far in this unit, we have examined the philosophy of Hinduism and Buddhism as major philosophical traditions of the east. Although Hinduism has no founding figure, the religion covers a diversity of views of the people of India dating as far back as 3,500 BCE and it has directly or indirectly influenced the philosophy of other Eastern philosophical traditions. *Vedas,* the sacred text of Hinduism describes features of various gods, rituals to appease them, and hymns to chant to them. Buddhism on the other hand, is a religion founded in India by Gautama Siddhartha (*Buddha),* and it has the *Pali Canon* which contains the foundation of all Buddhist teaching as creed. Both religions have had tremendous impact on eastern (Asian) philosophical traditions.

## 6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

- What is Hinduism? Briefly outline the main teachings of this religion with regards to the doctrine of *Atman-Brahman* or the *Self-God*
- Explain the teachings of Buddhism concerning the "four noble truths" as contained in the *Pali Canon.*
- How have these religions impacted the east (Asian) philosophical tradition?

## 7.0 References/Further Reading


Stephen Phillips, (2009) *Yoga, Karma and Rebirth: A Brief History and Philosophy,* Columbia: Columbia University Press.

Patrict Olivelle, (2014) *The Early Upanishads,* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rosen Steven J. (2006) *Essential Hinduism* Westport, CT: Praeger Publications.

Robert Hume, *Chandogya Upanishads,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, ND.

*Mahabharata, Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*.

Johnson, W. J. (1998) *The Saukpitaparvan of Mahabharata: The Massacre at Night,* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Robert E. Buswell jr. (2013) Donald S. Lopez jr., *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism,* Princeton University Press.

*Samyutta Nikaya,* available at www.readingfaithfully.org. Assessed on 18 October, 2019.

## UNIT FOUR: EASTERN (ASIAN) PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION II



### 1.0 Introduction

Welcome to this unit on Asian philosophical tradition II. The content of this unit will be discussed under two major eastern philosophies: the Confucian philosophy and the philosophy of Dao (Daoism). These philosophies share similar features with those described in the last unit, with respect to their focus on God and the cosmos and their being tied to local religious traditions. This final unit will examine these two traditions and how they have impacted the philosophical development of the east

### 2.0 Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- describe the main teachings of Confucianism
- describe the main teachings of Daoism
- state the sense in which both religions have impacted the eastern (Asian) philosophical tradition

### 3.0 Main Content

### 3.1 Confucian Philosophy

Around 500 BCE, China was in social upheaval and went through what is called its *Warring States* period. National emperors lost control over China's various territories while local rulers increased their strength, waging wars against each other to the point that only the strongest states could survive. Although exaggerated, stories reported that as many as 400,000 people were slaughtered in battles. In response to the problem of social chaos that impacted nearly everyone's life, a *Period of 100 Philosophers* emerged in which sages proposed various solutions. Some recommended a totalitarian system, concentrating power in the ruler. Others recommended loving everyone as a means of attaining peace. It was in this context that China's great teacher Confucius emerged, offering his own solution to the problem of social chaos.

Confucius (551-479 BCE) was born in what is now China's Shandong province, along the country's mid-costal region. His family name was Kung, and the name "Confucius," by which we know him in the West, is a Latinized version of "Kung Fu-tzu", which means Master Kung. His father, a distinguished soldier, and his mother both died when he was a child. He married at 19, had a son and daughter, and worked as a clerk in a temple in which he learned rituals from elders. Confucius set his eye on governmental work and eventually, in his 50s, held posts including police commissioner and imperial ambassador for a peace conference. Disillusioned by these jobs, he travelled for 13 years to the various states in China, giving advice on governance. He made the grandiose claim to show concrete social improvements within one year, and achieve complete change within three years. No ruler took him up on his offer and, disillusioned again, he returned to his home state. He continued teaching his followers and died at age 73. Although he considered himself a failure, his followers preserved and developed his teachings, which ultimately resulted in the flourishing of the Confucian school that heavily impacted Chinese intellectual life for 2,000 years.

Confucius's solution to the problem of anarchy was to return to the old Chinese customs before social turmoil broke out. To aid in that effort he researched China's old cultural traditions and edited several books of ancient Chinese history and literature. Confucius wrote nothing of his own views, the principal record of his teachings is contained in the work called the *Analects*, or "digested conversations," which is an unsystematic collection of discussions, recorded by his students after his death. While the *Analects* is somewhat sketchy and does not record any of Confucius's organized discourses, it does offer a picture of his central teachings. As a philosopher, Confucius was foremost, an ethicist who emphasized the importance of virtuous conduct. Much of his ethical thoughts focus on four specific themes: ritual conduct, humaneness, the superior person, child obedience, and good government.

Foremost among Confucius's teachings is the notion of *ritual conduct* (*li*), which is the effortless adherence to social norms and the performance of customs. By Confucius's time, ritual conduct became associated with ceremonial formality, particularly in religious practices. But Confucius uses the notion more broadly to include customs as diverse as major holiday celebrations and simple greetings. For Confucius, rituals and traditions are the visible glue that binds society together. For virtually every activity, there is a proper way of behaving. If we don't follow these customs, then, in spite of our best intentions, we behave like bumbling fools. He makes this point here:

> Respectfulness without the rules of ritual conduct becomes laborious bustle. Carefulness without the rules of ritual conduct becomes timidity. Boldness without the rules of ritual conduct becomes insubordination. Straightforwardness without the rules of ritual conduct becomes rudeness. When those who are in high stations properly perform all their duties to their relations, the people are inspired towards

> virtue. When old friends are not neglected by them, the people are preserved from meanness.[367]

Here's an example of how ritual conduct might apply to political life. Imagine that, during a meeting, I want to propose the development of a new park. As I make my case, I need to be duly respectful and careful, yet bold and straightforward. If I do not know the rules of ritual conduct, my efforts will be strained, and in the course of the discussion I can too easily either understate my view or inadvertently insult the council members. On the other hand, if I am properly skilled in the ritual conduct of business discussions, then I will be able to make my case easily and effectively.

There is both an inward and outward component of ritual conduct. The outward component concerns the visible ritual itself. The inward component involves having the proper attitude in ritual conduct, rather than simply going through the motions with no thought of their significance. Confucius argues that the true development of ritual conduct requires that we subdue ourselves. Also, when performing our various duties, it is important that our actions flow from within ourselves, and are not motivated by outward pressures. For Confucius, learning ritual conduct involves active social participation, similar to how we learn any skill or art form through direct involvement. Insofar as it is a skill, Confucius groups ritual conduct together with the skills of learning poetry and music. What all of these skills have in common is that they involve cultivating a special aesthetic sense of appreciation. They also refine us, elevate the quality of our lives, and serve as a tool for moral instruction.

Another important notion in Confucian philosophy is the notion of *humaneness* (*jen*). This is the attitude of goodness, benevolence, and altruism towards others. Again, there is a distinction between one's mere outer expressions of humaneness and one's inner sense of it: "Fine words and an insinuating appearance are seldom associated with true humaneness".[368] When we think of humane behaviour, we think of the various ways that we relate to other people, has Confucius relates here:

> The Master said, "It is humane manners that constitute the excellence of a neighbourhood. If a person in selecting a residence does not fix on one where such prevail, how can he be wise?" The Master said, "Those who are without humaneness cannot abide long either in a condition of poverty and hardship, or in a condition of enjoyment. The virtuous rest in humaneness; the wise desire humaneness." The Master said, "It is only the truly humane person who can love, or who can hate, others." The Master said, "If one's will is set on humaneness, there will be no practice of wickedness."[369]

[367] See Waley Arthur, Trans. The Analects of Confucius, New York: Vintage Books, 1938.
[368] Ibid.
[369] Ibid. See also The Analects of Confucius, Indiana University Press, 2015

To acquire humaneness, I should develop the virtues of dignity and patience, which will help me be at peace regardless of the difficulties that I face in life.

Central to the concept of humaneness is the Confucian *principle of reciprocity* (*shu*), which is "Do not do to others what you would not have them do to you." This principle is similar to the famous Golden Rule in the New Testament, namely, "Do to others what you would want done to yourself." The difference, however, is that while the Golden Rule puts forward a positive duty, that is, I should treat you benevolently or charitably since that is how I prefer to be treated, the principle of reciprocity, on the other hand, involves negative duties to avoid harm. For example, I should not steal from or lie to you since I would not want that kind of treatment myself. Because of this difference in emphasis, the principle of reciprocity is sometimes called the "Silver Rule." However, because of its emphasis on mere avoidance, the principle of reciprocity is sometimes criticized for being too passive: it is one thing to say that I should simply avoid harming you, but it is another and much better thing to say that I should actively seek your improvement. However, the wording of the principle of reciprocity is flexible enough to include positive as well as negative duties. For example, since I would not want anyone to withhold charity from me, then I should not withhold charity from others.

For Confucius, the *superior person* (*chun-tzu*) is the ideal human who personifies the virtue of humaneness. The term originally referred to children of aristocrats who inherited their family estates, but, like the term "gentleman" in English, the notion of a *superior person* acquired a broader ethical meaning. In the *Analects*, Confucius sees the superior person as the ideal to which his followers should strive. The superior person consistently exhibits a range of virtuous qualities, including humility, respectfulness, kindness, justice, impartiality, honesty, consistency, caution, and studiousness. Although this is a somewhat abstract list of qualities, a set of passages in the *Analects* points out some very particular attitudes of the superior person:

> The Master said, "The superior person is distressed by his lack of ability. He is not distressed by people not knowing him." The Master said, "The superior person dislikes the thought of his name not being mentioned after his death." The Master said, "What the superior person seeks is in himself. What the inferior person seeks is in others." The Master said, "The superior person is dignified, but does not wrangle. He is sociable, but not a partisan." The Master said, "The superior person does not promote someone simply on account of his words, nor does he put aside good words because of the person."[370]

In the above we see that, paradoxically, the superior person is not driven by a need for fame, yet at the same time he "dislikes the thought of his name not being mentioned after his death." What Confucius had in mind is something like this. The drive for fame while we are alive is too frequently tied with how wealthy, powerful, or successful we are. The underlying passions here are pride and arrogance, which the superior person should

[370] Ibid. See also D. C. Lau Trans. The Analects, Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2002

clearly reject. On the other hand, when we consider our life-long legacy and how people remember us after our deaths, we think more about how good we've been as human beings, and less about the degree of wealth and power that we've obtained. It is, then, admirable to hope to be remembered for our legacy as a good person.

In spite of the lengthy list of values that the superior person holds, Confucius stresses that the superior person is not a by-the-book rule follower, whose beliefs are rigidly fixed. On the contrary, "The superior person in the world does not set his mind either for anything, or against anything. What is right he will follow".[371] That is, the superior person's attitudes and conduct will be guided by an overall sense of justice, and not by a nit-picky set of regulations. In keeping with his emphasis on the internal aspects of moral attributes, Confucius describes the psychological state of tranquillity to which the superior person must rise. Distress, anxiety, and fear are all obstructions: "The superior person is satisfied and composed; the inferior person is always full of distress". Regardless of how much tragedy we might experience, our internal sense of virtue should give us peace: "When internal examination discovers nothing wrong, what is there to be anxious about? What is there to fear?" That is, if I know that my internal character contains the marks of virtue, then I can take faith in this, even if I'm plagued with misfortunes such as family tragedy or financial disaster.

Becoming a superior person involves an ongoing process that cannot be quickly attained, and an anecdote about a 17th century Confucian monk illustrates this point. Upon turning 90, the monk commented that he now saw how foolish he was at 80, and he looked forward to when he'd have better knowledge at a later age. Similarly, Confucius did not believe that he himself was a perfectly superior person: "In matters of learning I am perhaps equal to other people, but I have not yet attained to the character of the superior person, who carries out in his conduct what he professes"[372]. That is, Confucius did not yet fully embody the values he knew that he should possess.

## 3.2 The Philosophy of Dao (Daoism)

The notion of the *Dao* is the central concept in Daoism. Literally, the term means "way" or "path", but it more specifically refers to the fundamental ordering principle behind nature, society, and individual people. An initial obstacle to understanding the concept of the Dao is that it has an unspeakable mystical quality and cannot be defined. We see this in the opening and most famous passage of the book *Dao De Jing*:

> The Dao that can be named is not the eternal and unchanging Dao. The name that can be spoken is not the eternal and unchanging name. The nameless is the source of heaven and earth. The named is the mother of all things. Always be without desires and you will see mystery. Always be with desire, and you will see only its

[371] Ibid.

[372] Ibid. See also Van, Norden, Bryan, Confucius and the Analects: New Essays, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001

> effects. These two are really the same, although, as development takes place, they receive the different names. They are both a mystery, and where mystery is the deepest we find the gate of all that is subtle and wonderful.[373]

According to the above, if you try to name, speak, or describe the *Dao*, then you have missed the point and distorted the *Dao*'s meaning. It is an indescribable source of all existence, and we grasp the *Dao* only by mystically experiencing its subtlety. This experience begins with subduing one's desires. From the start, the *Dao De Jing* advocates a non-intellectual and even *anti*-intellectual approach. We should abandon hopes of finding an adequate verbal description of the *Dao*, and instead psychologically realign ourselves so that we are not driven by our desires. With no mental conceptions or desires to muddy the waters, we then allow the *Dao* to exhibit itself through our own lives, and we can recognize its presence in the natural world around us.

Another passage early on in the *Dao De Jing* states that the indescribable nature of the *Dao* is like an empty vessel, which we should never try to fill with concrete descriptions that will invariably misrepresent it:

> The Dao is like the emptiness of a vessel; and in our employment of it we must be on our guard against all fullness. How deep and unfathomable it is, as if it were the honored ancestor of all things. We should blunt our sharp points, and unravel the complications of things; we should dim our brightness, and bring ourselves into agreement with the obscurity of others. How pure and still the Dao is, as if it would continue forever. I do not know whose son it is. It might appear to have been before God.[374]

The *Dao*'s nature, according to the above, is infinitely deep and as mysterious as any investigation into the origin of things in the far distant past. To understand it, we must take an approach that is opposite to what we might expect. For example, we typically learn about things through our senses of sight, hearing, or touch. But the *Dao* lacks any sensory qualities that might enable us to perceive it in those ways. In fact, if we try to investigate the *Dao* as though it were just another physical object of perception, we will find that its nature actually consists of *lacking* any tangible qualities: "We look at it, and we do not see it, and we name it 'the colorless.' We listen to it, and we do not hear it, and we name it 'the soundless.' We try to grasp it, and do not get hold of it, and we name it 'the bodiless'". What is the *Dao*'s form? It is formless. What is its appearance? It is invisible. Try as we might to list its qualities, we are left with empty descriptions.

In spite of the *Dao*'s unspeakable quality, the *Dao De Jing* tells us at least something about the *Dao*'s nature. One recurring point is that the *Dao* both creates and sustains everything that exists: "The Dao produces all things and nourishes them; it

[373] Dao De Jing is a Chinese classic text traditionally credited to the Chinese philosopher and sage Laozi, though the text's authorship, date of composition and date of compilation are still debated.
[374] Ibid. See also D. C. Lau, Tao Te Ching, Hong Kong: Chinese university Press, 1989.

produces them and does not claim them as its own; it does all, and yet does not boast of it; it presides over all, and yet does not control them".[375] Although the *Dao* is the originator of all things, it should not be misconstrued as a kind of pre-existing God who created a universe distinct from itself. Rather, before things originated, the *Dao* was in a formless state of potential. As it took on the state of existence, the *Dao* produced things that remain part of its nature:

> There was something undefined and complete, coming into existence before Heaven and Earth. How still and formless it was, standing alone, and undergoing no change, reaching everywhere and in no danger of being exhausted. It may be regarded as the Mother of all things. I do not know its name, and I give it the designation of the Dao, the Way or Course.[376]

The *Dao De Jing* repeatedly refers to the *Dao* as the *mother* of everything, and the metaphor of a mother has important implications. A cosmic *father* evokes images of a craftsman or builder who aggressively manufactures the world from some external raw material. But a cosmic *mother* gives birth to things, generating them from within herself, and continually nurturing them. It is like a great tree that sprouts branches, leaves, and fruit, continually feeding them all from within. It is like a great river that spawns and sustains a myriad of life forms. The takeaway message is that we should all strive to follow the Dao. Animals and plants do this naturally, and it is only humans that have the capacity to act contrary to it since our minds makes us think that we are independent entities apart from nature. We create artificial environments in which to live and see nature as something to conquer for our personal benefit, rather than something that we should be part of. When we go against the Dao, the consequences are disastrous for us personally, and for everything that damage in our path.

A central theme of Daoism is that of *return*: all things eventually decay and return to their ultimate source within the Dao. There are clear natural cycles in the cosmos: everything around us has been recycled and will again be recycled. We tend to praise human accomplishments that have the most lasting value, such as timeless works of art, scientific discoveries, and moral traditions. However, when we look at nature, we see that nothing is permanent and everything comes and goes in cycles. Growth and decay are not just one-time events, but occur again and again in an endless natural cycle. This is the pulse of the universe that we find in most everything that we observe. Trees, animals, and even societies grow and die, and their elements will ultimately be recycled. The passage below illustrates this point with plants, which first display luxuriant growth, and then return to their origin:

> All things alike go through their processes of activity, and then we see them return to their original state. When things in the vegetable

[375] Ibid.
[376] Ibid.

> world have displayed their luxuriant growth, we see each of them return to its root. This returning to their root is what we call the state of stillness; and that stillness may be called a reporting that they have fulfilled their appointed end.[377]

Plants and animals die and decay, leaving their elements to become the raw materials of other things. We too will wither, die and decay, whether we like it or not. Chuang-tzu gives a story of a dying man whose body has become deformed. Rather than be angry and resistant to his physical changes, he gladly accepts them. According to Chuang-tzu, then, we should submit to the natural process of transformation, and to do otherwise amounts to disobedience: "If a parent tells a son to go east, west, south, or north, the son simply follows the command. The yin and yang [forces of nature] are more to a man than his parents are. If they are hastening my death and I do not quietly submit to them, I would be obstinate and rebellious." Ultimately, we have no say in the matter.

## 4.0 Conclusion

Confucian philosophy focused more on moral virtue and its moral message has a strong theme of social interconnectedness. For Daoism, Dao is the natural force of the universe, which underlies everything. The natural world is interconnected, both with its general laws and forces of nature that govern physical bodies throughout the universe, and with the ecological interdependence of living things on earth. And so, the ultimate reality can only be discovered within the cycles in the natural world in the context of this interconnectedness.

## 5.0 Summary

In this unit, we have examined two other major eastern philosophies: the Confucian philosophy and the philosophy of Dao (Daoism), which have had tremendous impact on eastern philosophical tradition. These philosophies share similar features with those described in the preceding unit, with respect to their focus on God and the cosmos and their being tied to local religious traditions. Most importantly however is the fact that these philosophies served as world views or guides to life the Chinese and some other societies in the east (Asia).

## 6.0 Self-Assessment Exercise

- Briefly outline the contributions of Confucian to resolving the the problem of anarchy in the old Chinese society of his days.
- Examine the following with respect to Confucian philosophy:
  i. the notion of *humaneness* (*jen*),
  ii. the notion of *ritual conduct* (*li*) and

[377] Ibid.

iii. the *principle of reciprocity* (*shu*)

- Explain Confucius' notion of the *superior person* (*chun-tzu*)
- Analyse the nature of Dao as the fundamental ordering principle behind nature, society, and individual people.
- A central theme of Daoism is that of *return.* Briefly explain what you understand by this statement.
- state the sense in which both Confucianism and Daoism have impacted the eastern (Asian) philosophical tradition

## 7.0 References/Further Reading


Gardner Daniel K. and Zhu Xis, (2003) *Reading of the Analects: Canon, Commentary and the Classical Tradition*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Kern Martin, "Early Chinese Literature, Beginnings Through Western Han" In Owen Stephen (2010) (Ed.) *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature Vol. I*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Waley Arthur, (1938) Trans. *The Analects of Confucius*, New York: Vintage Books.

Robert Eno, (2015) The Analects of Confucius, Indiana: Indiana University Press.

D. C. Lau, Trans., *The Analects*, (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2002).

Van, Norden, Bryan, (2001) *Confucius and the Analects: New Essays*, New York: Oxford University Press.

D. C. Lau, (1989) *Tao Te Ching*, Hong Kong: The Chinese university Press.

Austin Michael, (2010) *Reading the World: Ideas that Matter*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company.

Feng Cao, (2017) *Daoism in Early China: Huang-Lao Thought in Light of Excavated Texts*, Palgrave Macmillan.

Legge James, et al. (1901) (Eds.) *Sacred Books of China Vol. V*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Giles Lionel, et al., (1905) (Eds.) *The Wisdom of the East*, New York: E.P. Dutton and Co.

Addiss Stephen and Lombardo Stanley, (1991) *Tao Te Ching*, Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company.

Welch Holmes, (1965) *Taoism: The Parting of the Way*, Boston: Beacon Press.