

HUMAN EXISTENCE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: THE ROLE OF PHILOSOPHY

Gabriel C. Otegbulu

Humanities Unit, School of General Studies,
University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Abstract

Often times, scholars tend to isolate the importance of philosophy in offering meaning to the nature of human existence which when understood helps to foster sustainable development. They fail to understand that philosophy seeks to clarify and offer meaning to human existence and reality. Indeed, philosophy tries to reflect on the nature of truth and knowledge and this helps to add value and meaning to human life. As a speculative science that arose from wonder, curiosity and the desire to know, philosophy provides us with the tool for analysing, critiquing and interpreting the nature of human existence and issues bordering on development. This paper seeks to address the importance of using the tool of philosophy in offering meaning to human existence and sustainable development. The paper also examines how philosophy, as a branch of humanities, helps to unravel the nature of human existence. It explores how the understanding of human existence, using philosophy as a tool, creates a pathway for sustainable development. A combination of expository, analytic and evaluative methods will be employed. In this paper, the researcher argues that without philosophy, human existence will be meaningless and, as a result, holistic development will almost be impossible.

Keywords: Philosophy, Human Existence, Development, Sustainable Development

Introduction

The outbreak of natural science in the modern period with all the technological advancements and scientific breakthroughs saw many people question the importance of philosophy in the human society. Moreover, with the organisation of societies into nation states which stimulated the yearning for development and with man constantly questioning and searching for meaning for the purpose of existence, people ask whether philosophy plays an important role in human life and the development of human society. This concern is because they do not see the immediate result philosophy has in the practical and everyday affairs of human beings. Like Socrates, they ask: “Just what exactly do philosophers do?” Bertrand Russell (The Problem of Philosophy, 1978) brings out this confusion when he writes: “Many men, under the influence of science or of practical affairs, are inclined to doubt whether philosophy is anything better than innocent but useless trifling, hair-splitting

distinctions and controversies on matters concerning which knowledge is impossible.” Some people see philosophy as something that is completely esoteric, that is, it deals with issues outside the world. Little wonder some people think that philosophers waste their time studying things that are of no use.

However, all these ways of seeing philosophy do not state exactly what philosophy is, rather they state what philosophy is not. Philosophy is a speculative science that arose from wonders, curiosity and the desire to know. The beauty of philosophy lies in the fact that it provides us with the tool for analysing, critiquing and interpreting the nature of human existence and issues bordering on sustainable development. In this paper, the researcher will argue that without philosophy human existence will be meaningless and as a result holistic development will be almost impossible.

What is philosophy?

As there are many philosophers, so are there many answers to the question “what is philosophy”? This is partly because any attempt to answer the question gives rise to many other questions. Etymologically, the word *philosophy* comes from two Greek words, *Phileo* which means ‘to love’ and *Sophia* which means wisdom. Therefore, from etymological point of view, philosopher means *lover of wisdom*. It was Pythagoras who first used the word *philosophy*, when he called himself a lover of wisdom. Since he sees a philosopher as a lover or seeker of wisdom, philosophy, for him, becomes a rational, critical and objective inquiry. To define what philosophy is, philosophers have approached the question “what is philosophy”? in three ways:

The first group are those who seek an account of how philosophy differs from other academic disciplines and social practices. In other words, in asking the question “what is philosophy”? we also ask what it is not. We seek to demarcate it from non- philosophy” (Heidt, 2001, p. 5). The main point this group proposes is that philosophy’s concern is simply a very general understanding of the world. (Heidt, 2001) For instance, Stroud (2001, p. 28) argues that philosophy is “a reflection on very general aspects of the world, especially those aspects that involve or impinge on the lives of human beings”. From this, we observe that the subject matter of philosophy will be on issues of death, freedom, human interaction, justice, and so on. But, we have to note that not every way of thinking about them is philosophy; and that is where the question of demarcation comes in.

The second groups of authors are those who saw the question ‘what is philosophy’? as purely a normative enquiry. In other words, when asked normatively, the question will mean “what ought philosophy to be”? Thus, in responding to this question, one can say, according to C. Ragland and S. Heidt (2001, p. 6), philosophy seems to focus primarily on

(broadly) normative claims about either what we ought to think or what we ought to do. Therefore, for them, the subject matter of philosophy is normative in whatever form it presents itself.

The third groups are those who agree that philosophy is not reducible to a set of problems, a body of doctrine or a series of conclusions. They believe that philosophy is a continuous critical activity or the pursuit of endless enquiry. Philosophy does not end on any established theory, rather, as Stroud points out, it “depends on underlying curiosity and the pursuit of limitless enquiry” (Stroud, 2001). Most philosophers belong to this group, although there are some who vehemently hold the view that the aim of philosophy is to establish philosophical doctrines or theses. These three ways of looking at ‘what philosophy is’ point to one thing: that is, the beauty or uniqueness of philosophy lies not in the questions it asks, the unique way it asks those questions and the critical way it tries to answer them. This also shows that philosophy is a living subject and that it is vital in understanding the process of development and human existence.

According to J. C. Asike, the concept of philosophy can be understood in two ways: as a first order activity and as a second order activity. As a first order activity, philosophy is seen as the preserve of all rational beings. Therefore, in this loose sense, philosophy is seen and understood as a worldview or a principle that guides people’s lives. It is the unique way people try to make sense of their human experience. As a second other activity, philosophy is understood as the activity of professionals. In this sense, it is understood as a systematic and organized activity. It is in this academic sense that we are going to define philosophy. Socrates defined philosophy as a “reflective self-examination of the principles of the just and happy life”.

Aristotle defined philosophy as a systematic search for truth. F. O. C. Njoku (2014) sees philosophy as “a science understood not as a mere statement of facts of knowledge but as an organized body of knowledge. It is a critical examination of views and an evaluative tool for testing the pretensions of beliefs.” For Ludwig Wittgenstein, philosophy is the logical clarification of thought and the elucidation of propositions. Agudosy (2009) sees philosophy as “a rational and critical reflection on man, society and nature”. From these definitions, we see that philosophy has both rational and practical dimensions. As a rational activity, it involves reflection, the use of reason and a systematic pattern. As a practical activity, it probes into human experience to offer solution and meaning to the vicissitudes of human existence. Thus, for the purpose of this study, we can define philosophy as an organized body of knowledge that involves a critical reflection on the meaning and purpose of human existence aimed at establishing, enhancing and sustaining a just and happy life. Philosophy is all about improving human conditions.

Understanding Human Existence

The word *existence* comes from the Latin word *existere*, which means *to stand forth*. According to *The New International Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of English Language*, the word *existence* means “the state or fact of being, or continuing to be, whether as substance, essence, personality or consciousness. It is a possession or continuance of animate or vital being life. Anything that exists or has the quality of objectivity; an entity; actuality.” From this definition, we can say that anything that is in being exists. Thus, existence is the property of being. However, when we talk about human existence, it is because there are certain characteristics or peculiar qualities that are particular to human beings. Existentialist philosophers like Heidegger, Jean Paul Sartre, Soren Kierkegaard, Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel, among others, took it upon themselves to study the nature of existence as it affects human beings.

These existentialist philosophers concerned themselves with understanding human existence. They believed and taught that the existence of individuals is the highest truth. Human existence is more important than essence; for it is in existence we discover the individuality of each person. The project of existentialists was to help man find out the reason de être of his being. As Sartre puts it “Man exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and only afterwards, defines himself. In other words, man first exists, then he looks at the world, thinks of it and acts in it as an individual” (Sartre, 1943). The implication of this is that man is able to think and act only because he exists. It is only by living, thinking and acting that man defines himself. According to Sartre, human existence is characterized by freedom, creativity and responsibility. Lacey, echoing the voice of existentialists points out that what makes human existence peculiar is because of their rational nature and because they are created in the image of God. He insists that human beings are not things. Thus, he writes:

A feature of human existence ... is that men are active and creative while things are not. Things are simply what they are, but men might be other than they are. Men must choose, and (at least on some versions) must choose the principles on which they choose. They are not, like things, already determined. ‘Existence precedes essence’ for men; men make their essences as they go along, and do not live out a predetermined essence or blue-print. Men are free, and the reality and nature of freedom is a major concern for existentialists. (Lacey, 1979).

From Lacey’s view we can say that human beings exist while other things are. It is based on this that humans are conscious beings that are aware of their existence, their relationship

with other beings and their environment. Human existence is a unique type of existence. It is because of this uniqueness that human beings put other beings into consideration in their thoughts, actions and behaviours. Understanding human existence is all about living genuine and authentic life and improving human condition.

The Role of Philosophy in Human Existence

Philosophical thought is an inescapable part of human existence. From time immemorial, philosophy has shown significant interest in human existence. This is shown in the efforts of philosophers in using the tool of philosophy to analyze and evaluate human condition. There is no doubt that philosophy possesses the key to the proper direction of human affairs and also practical solution to human problems. Greek philosophers were the first to recognize this and made serious attempt to show that philosophy is of significant importance in the ordering of human affairs. To solve the problem of truth or certainty of knowledge which was the primary concern of human beings at that time, Socrates employed the method of “intellectual midwifery” whereby, through a series of questions and answers, he elicits knowledge from his interlocutor. But the Socratic method ended inconclusively, which was only an indication that knowledge remains a continuous quest and as such inconclusive.

Contrary to Socratic view, Plato believes that human beings possess certain knowledge of reality which cannot originate from the terrestrial world that is majorly characterized by constant change. Plato argued that the world of idea, which is casual, paradigmatic, changeless and eternal, is the source of human knowledge. By this, Plato tries to show that philosophic pursuit helps man to arrive at a certain or ideal knowledge which, when acquired, will order his affairs and also understand the reality of his existence. Plato, in his political philosophy, shows how a philosopher uses the knowledge of the ideal to salvage his society. He presents the philosopher as the last hope of the society. Plato’s belief that philosophers hold the key to changing the society is evident in the famous saying that “there will be no end to political trouble until those who are philosophers become rulers or those who are rulers are turned into philosophers” (Plato, 1997, pp. 6, 507e).

Aristotle’s attempt to depart from his master saw him ascribing to man the knowledge of things that are highest by nature. In his metaphysics, he argued that the philosopher, even though he does have knowledge of particular things, is gifted with the general knowledge of all things from their principles on account of which he should command the rest” (Aristotle, 1998, pp. 982a, 15-19). In his Physics, Metaphysics, and Posterior Analytics, Aristotle distinguished four major causes: material, formal, efficient and final cause. Aristotle’s aim for this distinction is to help man investigate meaningfully and successfully

or inquire about the world around him. The knowledge of this causes helps humans to answer the question ‘why’ this or that experience? on daily basis. The early stoics saw philosophy as a practical approach or shield against misfortune. For them, it does not only aid man to understand and have a better knowledge of the world, it also helps him to adopt the right attitude towards it. Thus, they see philosophy as that which has a “Psycho-practical utility” (Oguejiofor, 2001, p. 17).

The idea of the Divine or God is essential to human existence. That human beings cannot see Him, does not mean He does not exist or that He is not important to human existence. Some medieval philosophers like Anselm of Canterbury and Thomas Aquinas demonstrated the existence of God using the tool of philosophy. By making the distinction between a necessary being (a being who is self-sufficient and unlimited, is not caused by other beings, but brings other beings into existence) and contingent being (a limited being). Aquinas helps us to understand that God is a being who necessarily exists. He goes further to prove the existence of God using a cosmological argument. Apart from helping humans prove that immaterial beings exist, this distinction helps us to discover the truth of some realities that have plagued human existence. For instance, some people claim that human beings could turn into snake or other lower animal. But the distinction between necessary and contingent being helps us to understand that it is not metaphysically possible. According to Obiwulu (2017), “the being of a snake is different from the being of a human. Humans are corporeal and contingent beings, and are, therefore, not able to change their nature. Only a necessary being (like God) can do that”.

The scientific awakening and enlightenment of the modern period saw human beings face a big challenge in her existence. And that was the problem of human knowledge. Descartes’ methodic doubt was an attempt to establish the most indubitable principle upon which human knowledge will be based. The result of Descartes’ quest was the establishment of the rationalist tradition which holds that the human reason is the source of knowledge. David Hume’s empiricism was an insistence on strict logical demonstrability of human knowledge. Kant’s Copernican revolution saw to the marriage of the two prominent traditions of his time, namely: rationalism and empiricism. This marriage resulted in Kant asserting that the human mind is capable of grasping synthetic a priori knowledge.

One could ask, how does this debate on the source of human knowledge affect human existence? The dawn of the scientific era witnessed so much emphasis on the demonstrability of knowledge. It laid so much emphasis on the physical. But humans are always conscious of the fact that they are capable of transcending their immediate environment. As such knowledge is not limited by what can only be demonstrated empirically, there is also certain knowledge that intuition and reason can provide. This

knowledge of realities that are both ontic and ontological helps human beings to relate and interact well with one another and with their environment.

Language is an important element in human existence. This is because, with language, human beings interact and communicate with their environment, one another and the Divine. At the time analytic and linguistic movement started, there was need to analyze the result of science. Consequently, analytic and linguistic philosophers were convinced that textual analysis would be the tool for analyzing scientific results. Bertrand Russell, who was at the fore front of the origin of this movement, was convinced that philosophy provides us with deeper perception of reality and that it opens the human mind to many possibilities that would enlighten him in improving his life. Thus, he insists that if per impossible “all men were well off, if poverty and disease had been reduced to their lowest possible point, there would still remain much to be done to produce a valuable society” (Russell, 1978, p. 89). By this, Russell insists that there is a yearning in human existence which only philosophy can provide.

Existentialists gave philosophy a new impetus when it turned its attention to the dark, shadowy side of human existence with their analysis of such phenomena as anxiety, dread, freedom and death. By doing this, existentialists focused their attention on those conditions that directly confront human existence. They used the tool of philosophy to show how human beings can confront these realities and still make themselves the individuals that they are. For instance, Heidegger’s fundamental ontology was an effort to resurrect and to provide an answer to the question of being. This involves an inquiry into the existential constitution of Dasein (human life). In discussing Dasein’s existence as being-in-the world, Heidegger makes it clear that humans’ fundamental mode of being in the world is action and that the world is better understood in terms of the categories which enter into the explanation of our actions (Heidegger, 2010). Heidegger’s existentialism is basically geared towards how man can realize himself and live out an authentic existence. The role of existentialists in human existence can better be articulated in the following words. Existentialism is “a spirit of revolt against the pretensions of reason, against the dehumanizing conditions of modern life, and against the attempts of the sciences to reduce persons to simply one more type of object among others in nature” (Lawhead, 2015, p. 566). So far, we have been able to highlight the role of philosophy in human existence, by showing that what philosophers have done over time was to use the tool of philosophy to see how human existence can be meaningfully understood. One thing to note is that philosophy’s role in human existence is immeasurable and highly unquantifiable. Philosophy, more than any discipline, has provided us meaningful insight to human existence.

What is Sustainable Development?

For us to understand the word sustainable development, we need to understand the term *development*. The term development is variously understood by different people. Some see development as the ability of people to live modern and civilized life which entails having access to good roads, quality health care, access to good water, quality education, enjoying good food and the gains of technological advancements. Others see development from economic perspective. Thus, they understand development as one which the Gross National Product (GDP) or per capita income is constantly experiencing steady and sustainable growth. Some others see development as equitable distribution of goods and services. For others, development has to do with changing one's way of thinking. Still, others see development as political stability. All these ways of viewing development go a long way to show that development is not one single thing; it is multifaceted and holistic. However, the variation in the definition depends on who is defining it and from what intellectual point of view.

Etymologically, the word *development* comes from the French word *developeur*, which means "to wrap up", 'unfold', 'to bring out' the latent possibilities". Therefore, development means the art of bringing out something that is hidden. It has to do with making obvious something that is latent. It has to do with "quantitative increase." Often times, some scholars equate development with only economic, infrastructural or political growth. But development is not something that is limited to the area of infrastructure or economics. Development is rather holistic; it deals with every aspect of life since all affect human existence in one way or the other. Hence, we can understand development as a process of effecting a qualitative change to the overall well-being of man and the society.

Historically, the earliest use of the term *development* was found in the work of Schumpeter entitled "Theorie de Wirtschaftilisheme Entwicklung". There he used the concept of innovation to identify development. This "innovation" incorporates both techno-economic and politico-social demands. He gave the names: unfolding, evolution, development. The Frenchman Francois Perroux, defines *development* as "the combination of mental and social changes of a people which enable them to increase, cumulatively and permanently, their total real production." He further argues that development is achieved fully in the measure that, by reciprocity of service, it prepares the way for reciprocity of consciousness. Socialists sees development as man's ability to appropriate his total essence in a total manner as a whole man. It is a holistic vision in which mankind assumes control of his destiny (Nakpodia, 2011).

For sociologists, development is concerned with progress towards desired social goals. However, we have to note that development is not a project rather a process. According to Nakpodia (2011), development is “the process by which people create and recreate themselves and their circumstance to realize higher levels of civilization in accordance with their own choices and values”. This definition highlights the fact that the people are both the end and the agent of development. This is because it is something they must do for themselves, even though external help is often needed.

The term sustainable development is used to describe a development that includes social, economic, human and environmental aspects. It is “a development for the future welfare of humanity” (Honderich, 2005, p. 122). There are many definitions of the term sustainable development, but there is a common definition which was accepted at the World Commission on Environment and Development in Brundtland in 1987. It defined sustainable development as “a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. Sustainable development, according to Omoyibo (1998), recognizes three important aspects, namely:

1. Raising people’s living level, namely: their income and consumption level of food, medical services, education, etc. through relevant economic growth processes.
2. Creating conditions conducive for the growth of people’s self-esteem through the establishment of social, political and economic systems and institutions which promote human dignity and respect.
3. Increasing people’s freedom to choose by enlarging the range of their choice variables.

At the foundation of this definition is the concern for the overall well-being of human beings.

Philosophical Theories and Sustainable Development

There are some philosophical theories that have emanated to support the need for sustainable development. Here, we are going to carefully examine those theories and see how relevant they are to the need for sustainable development. The aim of looking at the theories is to see how they attempt to answer the following questions. What are human needs? How do we know the needs of future generations?

Normative theories can be divided into two main groups. They are the consequentialist ethical theories, which focus on the bringing about or eliciting from human action the best overall consequences, and the non-consequentialist. It exists in deontological theories or duty ethics. According to these theories, the moral rightness of actions is determined by other factors than the consequences of the actions (Ariansen, 1993, p. 113).

There are basically two consequentialist ethical theories. They are utilitarianism and Rawl's theory of justice. We shall carefully examine these two theories to see how they affect sustainable development. Utilitarians argue that a morally correct action or policy is one that produces the greatest amount of utility for the members of the society. Jeremy Bentham, the founder of utilitarianism, argues that utility or happiness is equal to pleasure. He averred that a society should be organised or structured in such a way that people's happiness (pleasure or pleasurable experience) is as high as possible and their unhappiness as low as possible. According to Hansson, this utilitarian approach is contrary to traditional and religious moralities. This is because, firstly, it considers people's happiness and not their piety or virtuous character as a significant factor. Secondly, it emphasizes the equality of human beings; therefore, nobody's happiness should supersede that of others, irrespective of sex, background or social position (Hansson, 2002, pp. 34-35).

G. E. Moore gives a wider perspective on the definition of utility. He argues that pleasure is not the only value to take into consideration when talking about utility; other things like knowledge, love, beauty, etc. have value and should, therefore, be included. Moore's understanding of utility is regarded as ideal utilitarianism unlike Bentham's form of utilitarianism that is hedonistic. The ideal and hedonistic utilitarianism have been criticized on the ground that "it gives specific content to values such as happiness, knowledge and beauties" (Backlung, 2014, p. 10). There is also the preference utilitarianism. This theory argues that preference satisfaction increases people's utility independent of what those preferences are. But the problem with this theory is that we don't always know what our preferences are. We may act based on a preference only to regret it later. According to Kymlicka (1995, pp. 22-23), what humans believe is important to do when they are thinking is not always the same as what they prefer to do for the moment. The best way to overcome this regret is by aiming to satisfy those preferences that are based on complete and accurate information. There is also a fourth kind of utilitarianism that is called welfare utilitarianism. This welfare utilitarianism focuses on external living conditions rather than on internal mental states. This form of utilitarianism focuses on people's access to basic amenities like housing, health care, education, electricity, pipe-borne water, good roads, etc.

John Rawl's theory of justice is another form of consequential ethical theory. According to Rawl, all social values - liberty and opportunity, income and wealth and all the bases of respect are to be distributed equally, unless an unequal distribution of all or any of these values are to be the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of the society. Rawl insists that, for there to be justice, there should be equal distribution of resources. The happiness or comfort of many should not be sacrificed at the altar of a few. One may ask

how these theories affect sustainable development. From the point of view of utilitarianism, it aims at maximizing the total utility. In other words, it sees human beings as equal bearers of utility.

The implication is that we all have the same responsibility for future generations. This means that when important decisions on developmental projects are being made or when a major decision on the need for improving human condition is being made, the utilitarian question will be, does this generate most total utility for those affected? If yes, then it is a correct thing to do. If contrary, then it does not benefit human beings. Rawl's theory of justice also supports sustainable development. Often times, we discover that the distribution of resources is not evenly done and also tackling some environmental problems that affect poor people who live in poor areas is not given prompt attention. This is because our society does not pay attention to just distribution of resources. Rawl insists that, for sustainable development to take place, we should handle issues of development as if we do not know where in the society one is born.

The other type of normative theory is the non-consequentialist ethical theories. In these theories "actions are valued not by their consequences but by whether they are made with good intention, if they are possible to place in a set of rules and also on different kinds of duties and virtues" (Backlung, 2014, p. 11). Kant's moral theory, which is based on the categorical imperative, is one of the non-consequentialist theories. The imperative states "Act only according to that Maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law without contradiction." This means that whatever action I want to posit, one must first answer the question: would a rational individual accept it as a universal rule? Or, is this action of mine universalizable? The implication of answering the question is that any action put up out of self interests is not ethically correct. Gron (1988, pp. 285-286) affirms this by stating that "The fact that all actions should be possible to place in a set of universal rule forbids actions that are merely done out of egoistic motives". Kant's deontological or duty ethics is related to sustainable development in the sense that it gives us the opportunity to reflect on the way we distribute natural resources, how we interact with our environment, how we relate to people, and so on. It aids us to act in such a way that our actions are universalizable. When our actions are universally acceptable it helps promote sustainable development.

Another type of non-consequential ethical theory is virtue ethics. This theory focuses on the development of human character. It was developed by ancient philosophers who presented four main virtues of justice, wisdom, courage and moderation. This was first introduced by Plato and was later developed by Aristotle. Aristotle argues that a good life entails

acquisition of those characteristic that distinguishes human being from non-human beings. And those characteristics are the ability to reason and rationality. Anna Backlund observed that “Instead of promoting a theory of ethics based on consequences of action, human right or a social contract, Aristotle argued for the idea that a human being of excellence will understand that it is rational to develop certain traits of character called virtues. These virtues make it possible for the human being to develop a peaceful life in the human community” (Backlung, 2014, p. 12).

Modern virtue ethics presents a similar position but argues that the character traits that should be developed are those that are needed not only for the individual’s development but also for society as a whole. Hansson (2002, p. 64) observes that the consequence of this is that desirable virtues may vary from one society to another, depending on their tradition. The connection between virtue ethics and sustainable development is found in environmental virtue ethics. Proponents of this environmental virtue ethics argue that the characters we should acquire should be the ones that lead to the preservation of virtue for its own sake and for the sake of becoming better and more joyful persons. But the question is: does the preservation of nature guarantee joyful and happy living? Lisa Newton argues that the emphasis on the material welfare of people is a good motivation. She believes that the focus on the joys of living on the basis of a character of environmental virtue is the principal motivation for people to live in an environmentally sustainable way (Holly, 2006, pp. 394-396). She, therefore, proposes the acquisition of the cardinal virtue of simplicity. This simple lifestyle does not mean a life of austerity and deprivation; it is rather a life that contains joy and satisfaction. It is the acquisition of this simple lifestyle that ensures the integrity, stability and beauty of the ecosystem. This fosters sustainable development. In this section, we have shown how using the tool of philosophy has helped in outlining policies for sustainable development. That philosophers hold varied views or opinions concerning an issue does not suggest that the discipline is of no use to human beings. The reason for this varied opinion is for individuals or society to choose which philosophy suits their immediate need. It is also an indication that the discipline is very much alive and useful.

The Impact of Philosophy/Philosophers in the Society

Some people have argued that the world can do without philosophy and philosophers, but the truth is that to argue in such way is only but betrayal of one’s ignorance. A society without philosophers and philosophy is like a house without foundation. Just as a house without foundation cannot stand, likewise sustainable development is not possible without philosophy. Philosophy has contributed immensely to the development of human society and also in ensuring the overall well-being of human beings. From earliest times, more than any other professional, philosophers have concerned themselves with the political stability

of the nation state in order to ensure the well-being of humans. This they did by developing political theories that better ensure political stability. For instance, in Ancient times, Plato and Aristotle were prominent for their political theories which contributed a great deal in the political organization of Athens. While Plato proposed an ideal state where only philosophers would become kings, Aristotle sees the city state as a hylomorphic compound (citizen-body) which comes into being for the sake of life but exists for the sake of the good life. This good life or happiness is its proper end.

In modern times, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean Jacques Rousseau were prominent for their social contract theory. This social contract theory contributed a great deal in the formation of nation states. History has it that it exercised a heavy influence in the organization of the society even till today. For instance, John Locke's representative government was what gave rise to democracy, which is practised in most countries today although in a reformed pattern.

Philosophers have also come up with ethical theories that could help human beings enhance their relationship with their environment and evaluate human conduct in order to ensure a just and harmonious society. For instance, the ethical theory of utilitarianism can be used to ensure sustainable development since it is an all-encompassing pursuit of developmental goals that will ensure the greatest good of all. Utilitarianism is based on the principle that an action is good if it promotes the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people. If this is so, the utilitarian doctrine enjoins all to act in such a way as to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Thus, utilitarians seek the good or happiness of many. If a society is structured along this theory or principle, it then means that the society will produce the greatest number of happy people. Also, Kant's categorical imperative is another effort to ensure a just and harmonious society. The theory of categorical imperative highlights the fact that the human person needs to be treated with respect and dignity while also promoting his/her interest. In today's world where human beings are treated with lack of respect and dignity, Kant's categorical imperative comes as a solution. It is also a means of furthering right human relationships.

In the domain of education, philosophy and philosophers have played significant roles in ensuring quality education for quality assurance. If we agree from the etymology that philosophy is love of wisdom and we know that the essence of education is to lead one to virtue, and one of such virtues, according to Aristotle, is wisdom, it then means that philosophy is an indispensable tool for ensuring quality education. Philosophy provides the theoretical framework needed for the development of sound educational system. Behind every educational system or curriculum, there is always an underlying philosophy that

guides it. This is possible because philosophers have devoted a great deal of intellectual energy in developing a good and sound philosophy of education that will ensure the overall well-being of man.

The world is made up of people from different races, cultures, ethnic origins and countries. Often, this brings about discrimination, division, hatred and rancour. In situations like this, philosophy comes in to play a major role. For instance, our knowledge of substance and accidents in metaphysics enables us to understand that every human shares one substance - humanity of the human person. The study of philosophy helps us to understand that we all share one humanity and that no race or tribe or ethnic group is superior to others. If we understand this, it will help to bring about good human relationships among all peoples of the world. Thus, it is the proper appreciation of the impact of philosophy that makes it possible for man to fit well in interpersonal, inter-ethnic, intercultural and international relationships. The point is that philosophy provides us with the material for good, healthy and authentic human relationships.

Economic development is another important area where philosophy has played significant role and where its impact is greatly felt. Economic development is all about production and distribution of goods and services for the good of the human society. Philosophy has all the paraphernalia for ensuring economic development. As a reflective activity, philosophers come up with good theories and policies that aim at fostering economic growth and development. Adam Smith's economic theory is a practical example of what philosophy and philosophers can do to improve the economic situation of a country. The efforts of philosophers have given birth to a branch of philosophy called philosophy of economics. It deals with inquiries concerning rational choice, appraisal of economic outcomes, institutions and process, and the ontology of economic phenomenon (Hausman, 2015). Philosophy is a vehicle of social change. Philosophy provides the necessary ingredient needed for maintaining social order in a given society. Social change has to do with transformation in the thought patterns of a people or an individual. As a reflective activity, philosophy provides us with the intellectual disposition to tackle some of our superstitious beliefs and also helps to shed new light on some issues that border on individual development and national growth. It also helps us to deal with some of those issues that bring about social tensions like racism, child marriage, breaching of one's fundamental human rights, etc.

Conclusion

Philosophy is basically the search for truth: truth about human existence, truth about policies that can enhance sustainable development. This search for truth, this pursuit for knowledge

is not in need of justification; it is its own reward. Without such autotelic activities, life would be empty. Philosophy can be likened to the foundation that holds a building, without a solid foundation, the building will collapse. This function of philosophy lays on it a heavy task - the task of liberating humans from the things that blindfold them and make it impossible for them to have good living conditions. When a good living condition is attained, sustainable development is assured. Philosophy has always been at the service of humanity; the problem is that we appear to have blinded our minds to what philosophy can offer.

In some societies, especially in developing countries, the role of philosophy is often downplayed and the effect is that no matter the efforts made it is always evident that there is a missing link. As such, there is a weakening of the value system, political instability, lack of infrastructural development, environmental degradation, poor economic policies, lack of quality health care, poor standard of education, and so on. It is only philosophy that can fill this missing link in a way that other disciplines cannot do. If we are to appreciate human existence and work for sustainable development, we have to embrace philosophy and allow it do its work in our lives and the society. But as long as we imprison philosophy in the classroom, we will never appreciate its transforming effect. Philosophy is the soul of human existence and the society. No human society can grow without philosophy.

This paper, therefore, argues that philosophy plays an important role in understanding human existence and fostering sustainable development. This role is found in what philosophers do, that is, using the technique of philosophy to make human life better. It is this all-important role of philosophy that brings out its usefulness in human existence and in ensuring sustainable development. Without philosophy offering meaning and solving the problem of human existence, almost every endeavour about sustainable development will mean nothing.

References

- Agudoso, F. Philosophy as a Profession. In B. Ewelu, *Philosophy: of What Relevance* (pp. 15-56). Enugu: Delta Publications, 2009.
- Ariansen, P. *Miljöfilosofi*. Nora: Nya Doxa, 1993.
- Aristotle. *Metaphysics*. London: Penguin Books, 1998.
- Backlung, A. *Philosophical Perspective on Sustainable Development with Focus on The Urban Poor*. Stockholm: Kungliga Tekniska Hogskolan, 2014.
- Gron, A. *Filosoflexikonet*. Stockholm: Bokforlaget Forum AB, 1988.
- Hansson, S. O. *Teknik Och etik*. Stockholm: Kungliga tekniska hogskolan, 2002.
- Heidegger, M. *Being and Time*. New York: New York University Press, 2010.

- Heidt, C. R. The Art of Philosophizing. In C. R. Heidt, *What is Philosophy* (pp. 1-22), 2001. Binghamton, NY: Vail-Ballou Press.
- Holly, M. Enviromental Virtue Ethics, a Review of some current work. *Journal of Agricultural and Enviromental Ethics*, 394-396, 2006.
- Honderich, T. *The Oxford Guide to Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Kymlicka, W. *Modern Political Philosophy*. Falun: Nya doxa, 1995.
- Lacey, A. R. *A Dictionary of Philosophy*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979.
- Lawhead, W. F. *The Voyage of Discovery: A Historical Introduction to Philosophy*. Mississippi: Cengage Advantage Books, 2015.
- Njoku, F. O. *Philosophy, Communication, Conflict Resolution and Peace*. Enugu: Claretian Publications, 2014.
- Obiwulu, A. MetaPhysics and Human Existence. In J. O. Ezeanya, *Logic, Philosophy and Human Existence*. Pp. 76-89, 2017. Enugu: Ebenezer Productions.
- Oguejiofor, J. O. *Philosophy and African Predicament*. Ibadan: Hope Publications, 2001.
- Plato. Republic. In J. C. Hutchinson, *Complete Works of Plato* (Pp. 224-378, 1997). Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Russell, B. *The Problem of Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.
- Sartre, J. P. *Being and Nothingness*. Washington: Washington Square Press, 1943.
- Stroud, B. What is Philosophy. In C. R. Heidt, *What is Philosophy* (Pp. 22-45, 2001). Binghamton, NY: Vail-Ballou Press.